



BLUMENTHAL
PERFORMING ARTS

A FOCUS ON VINCENT VAN GOGH'S ART ELEMENTS

TEEN AND ADULT

Mood and Light, Movement and Line

Although Van Gogh's painting career was relatively short, he painted over 900 paintings over the 10 year period. One can easily identify his early work by observing the dark tones, compared to the bright, intense colors he used in his later work. Van Gogh was something of a nomad, traveling all over The Netherlands, England, Belgium and France. He first started painting while living in The Hague, Netherlands. *The Potato Eaters*, 1885 was considered his first masterpiece and was completed while he was living in Nuenen, Netherlands. He had not yet developed his unique style of line, but successfully created an intense **mood** within the constraints of a limited and dull color scheme. We also see him using a contrast in light, directing attention to the subjects' faces, which he uses in several future paintings as well. Van Gogh spent two years painting in Paris where he met, and was inspired by, French Impressionists of the time. He began to express himself with bright warm colors, contrasting the browns and greys found in his work thus far. Another inspiration was the vibrant, rural imagery of Japanese woodblock prints. He decided to move to the countryside of Arles, France, where he created some of his most **light**-filled paintings. *Wheatfield With a Reaper* was painted during the last year of his life, and is filled with intense hues of yellows, subtly contrasted with blues and greens. You also see his expressive brushstroke style which he refined over the years. The dotted, wavy **lines** of the wheatfield adds a quality of movement found in so many of his later works.



The Potato Eaters, 1885



Wheatfield With a Reaper, 1889



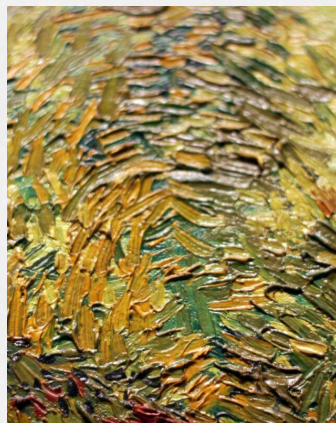
Starry Night, 1889

Another example of **movement** in line is seen in one of his most famous works of art *Starry Night*, which was also painted in the last year of his life. The foreground of the painting consists of a town and church. The muted tones and uniform lines depict a calm, isolated scene. In contrast, the sky above is painted with bright colors and swirling dotted lines that create movement around the stars and moon.



Technique

Vincent Van Gogh used a technique called **Impasto** when he painted. That means he used so much paint that when it dried, it was actually raised off the surface of the canvas. In fact, the thick paint was so texturized that it seemed three-dimensional, instead of flat paint soaked into the canvas. To achieve this technique he had to put a lot of paint on his brush, and sometimes even used something called a palette knife to scoop up even more paint! Almost all of his paintings were completed in one short day, which is pretty fast. Since the paint was so thick, it wasn't able to dry before he moved on to different parts of the painting. Can you see which parts of the paintings below have more or less paint on them? Can you imagine what the surface of these paintings would feel like?



In addition to using innovative techniques like impasto, Van Gogh was part of the new **Post-Impressionist** Movement of Art, which developed between 1886 and 1905 after the Impressionist Movement of Art. Post-Impressionist painters carried on some ideas of Impressionists painters like trying to capture the natural look of light, but rejected its limitations and rigid rules. Post-Impressionists used vibrant colors, liberal applications of paint, and worked from real life environments. However, they painted those environments not as they were seen by the human eye, but how they were seen through their personal visions and imaginations. Symbolism was also an important element of Post-Impressionist artworks. Paul Gauguin, one of Van Gogh's closest friends, was also a leader in the movement.

Subject

Vincent Van Gogh drew inspiration from life itself. He observed the people, places, and everyday objects around him. Throughout his travels he met many people and made a few life-long friends. He considered portraits his most important group of work. He once wrote: "What I'm passionate about, much much more passionate about than all the rest in my profession- is the portrait, the modern portrait." Instead of duplicating the photographic quality of a portrait, he tried using techniques that were unconventional for his time. His goal was to illustrate the essence of his subject using color and expressive brushwork. He wanted them to "have a life of their own."



Portrait of Joseph Roulin 1889



Peasant Woman 1890



Portrait of Pere Tanguy 1887

He also painted 36 **self-portraits** throughout his career, each illustrating a different mood or phase in his life. Looking at the three portraits below, how do you think Van Gogh was feeling when he painted each of them? What elements are the same? What elements are different?



On a separate piece of paper, draw a self-portrait. What techniques can you use to illustrate your personality? **Hint: Think about Van Gogh's use of Color and Line*

Most people recognize Vincent Van Gogh's **landscapes**. He would pack up his folding easel, stool and wooden box of art supplies and trek off into the countryside to paint the beauty of nature. He felt a strong connection to natural environments. He once wrote: "I have nature and art and poetry, and if that is not enough, what is enough?" He almost always finished a single painting in a day, which was impressively quick, and not typical of most artists.



*Mountainous Landscape Behind
St. Paul Hospital 1889*



*Landscape with Carriage
and Train 1890*

VAN GOGH I SPY NOTES