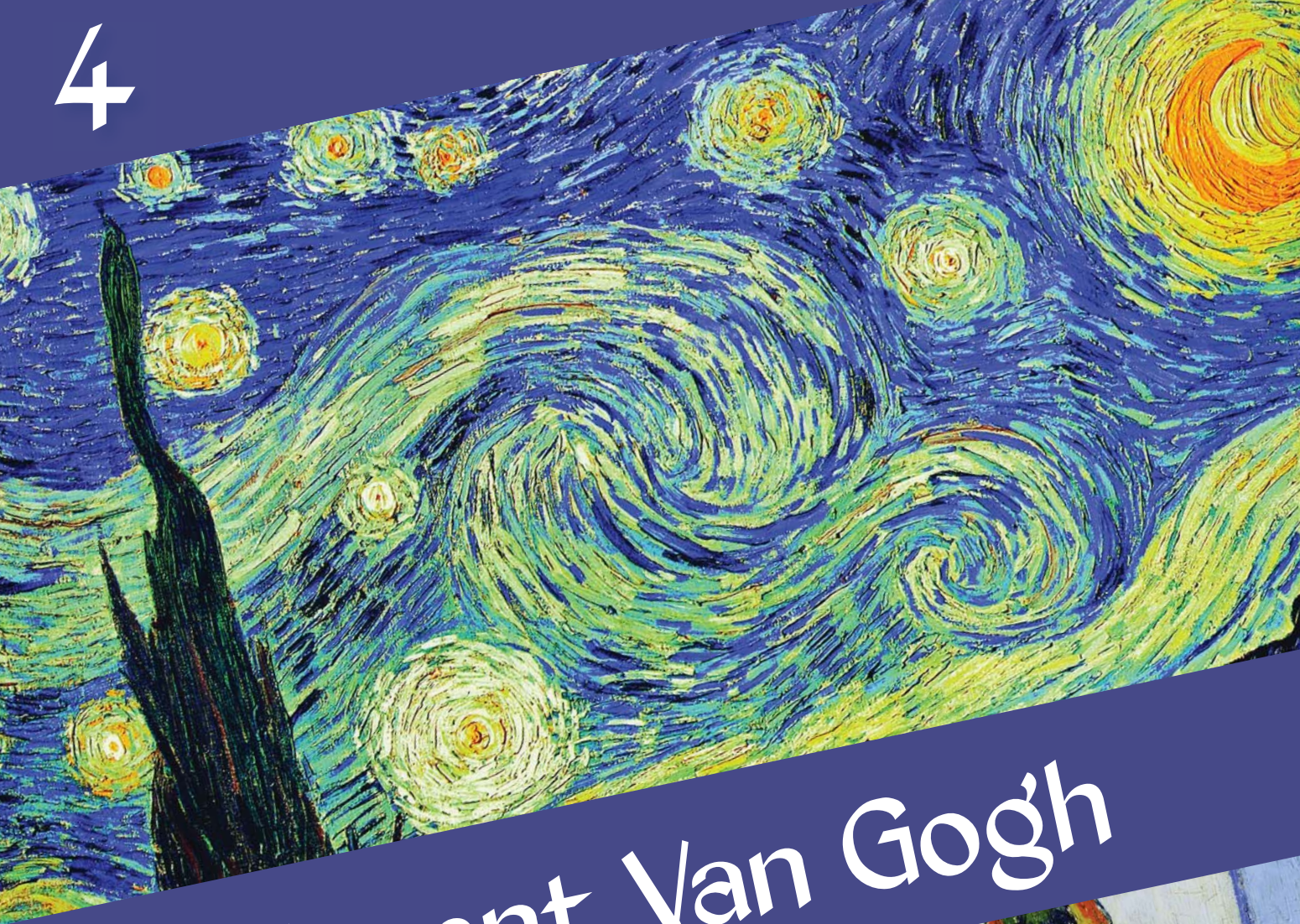
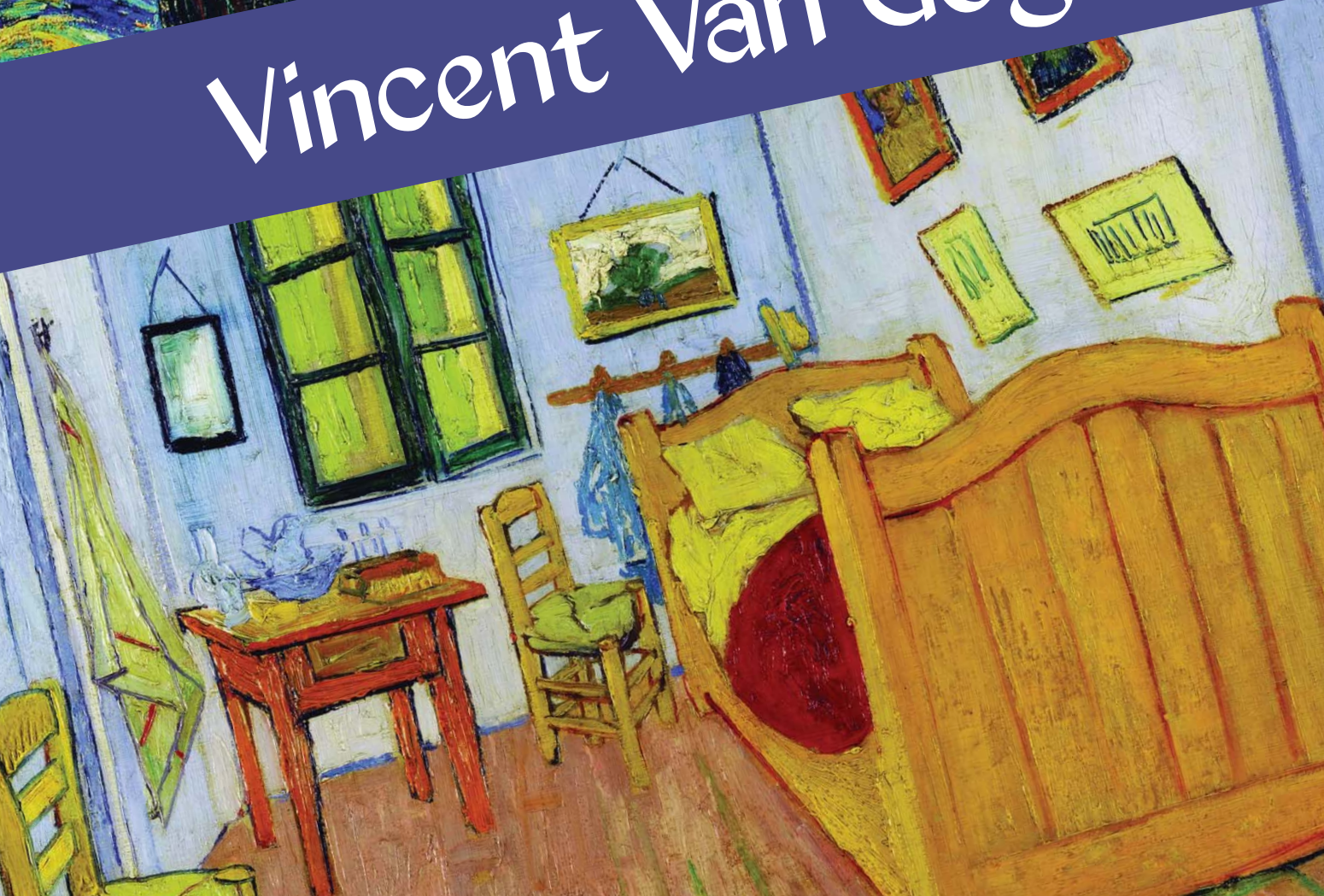


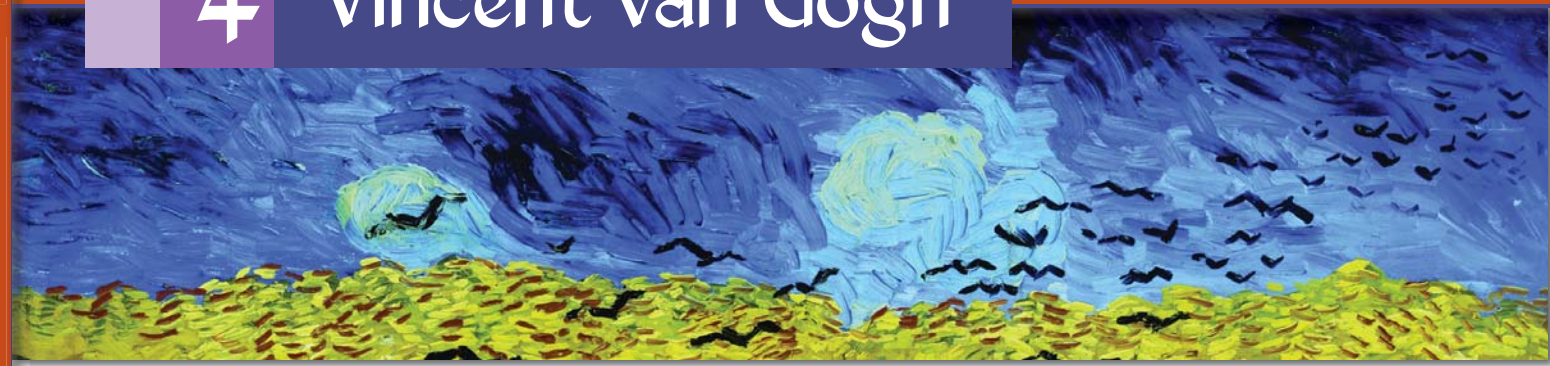
4



# Vincent Van Gogh



# 4 Vincent van Gogh



1. ✓ How many famous painters' names can you think of?  
✓ Where are they from? Can you name some of their works?

You can browse through the internet and try to find as many famous painters' names as you can.



2. You are going to watch a video and listen to a song called "Starry-starry Night" by Don Mc Lean. Before listening, read the lyrics of the song and match the underlined phrases with the relevant Van Gogh painting. Then watch the video and put the stanzas in the correct order.



Starry, starry night.  
Flaming flowers<sup>1</sup> that brightly blaze,  
Swirling clouds<sup>2</sup> in violet haze,  
Reflect in Vincent's eyes of china blue.  
Colors changing hue,  
morning field of amber grain<sup>3</sup>,  
Weathered faces lined in pain<sup>4</sup>,  
Are soothed beneath the artist's loving hand.



For they could not love you,  
But still your love was true.  
And when no hope was left in sight  
On that starry, starry night,  
You took your life, as lovers often do.  
But I could have told you, Vincent,  
This world was never meant  
for one as beautiful as you.



Now I understand  
 what you tried to say to me  
 and how you suffered for your sanity  
 and how you tried to set them free  
 they would not listen they did not know how  
 perhaps they'll listen now.



Starry, starry night.  
 Portraits hung in empty halls,  
Frameless heads<sup>5</sup> on nameless walls,  
 With eyes that watch the world and can't forget.  
 Like the strangers that you've met,  
 The ragged men in the ragged clothes,  
The silver thorn of bloody rose<sup>6</sup>,  
 Lie crushed and broken on the virgin snow.



Shadows on the hills,  
Sketch the trees and the daffodils<sup>7</sup>,  
Catch the breeze and the winter chills<sup>8</sup>,  
In colors on the snowy linen land<sup>9</sup>.



Now I think I know what you tried to say to me,  
 How you suffered for your sanity,  
 How you tried to set them free.  
 They would not listen, they're not listening still.  
 Perhaps they never will...



Starry, starry night.  
Paint your palette<sup>10</sup> blue and grey,  
 Look out on a summer's day,  
 With eyes that know the darkness in my soul.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dipFMJckZOM> or with lyrics [www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxHnRfhDmrk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxHnRfhDmrk)

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3. Work with a partner. Together, you will try to fill in the blanks, correct the wrong words or strike out the extra words. Organise your work before you listen.

Starry starry night  
..... your palette blue and grey  
look out on a summer's day  
with eyes that know the darkness in my *bowl*  
Shadows on the hills and cliffs  
..... the trees and the daffodils  
catch the breeze and the winter *drills*  
in colours on the ..... linen land.

Now I understand  
what you tried to say to me yesterday  
and how you suffered for your *vanity*  
and how you tried to ..... them free  
they would not listen they did not know how  
perhaps they'll *fasten* now.

Starry starry night sky  
Flaming flowers that brightly .....  
swirling clouds in violet *days*  
reflect in Vincent's eyes of china blue  
colours ..... hue  
morning fields of amber grain  
weathered faces lined in *rain*  
are soothed beneath the artist's loving *band*.

Now I understand well  
what you tried to say to me  
and how you suffered for your sanity  
and how you tried to set them free  
they would not listen  
they did not know how to listen  
perhaps they'll listen now and forever.

For they ..... not love you  
but still your love was true  
and when no hope was left beside  
on that starry starry night  
You took your life as lovers often do  
But I ..... have told you, Vincent,  
this world was never meant for one  
as *dutiful* as you are.

Starry starry night  
..... hung in empty halls  
frameless heads on nameless *dolls*  
with eyes that watch the world and can't  
forget them  
like the strangers that you've met  
The ragged men in ragged clothes  
a silver thorn a ..... rose  
lie crushed and broken on the virgin snow.

Now I think I know very well  
what you tried to say to me  
and how you suffered for your sanity  
and how you tried to set them *tree*  
they would now listen  
they're not listening still  
..... they never will.



4. Now read the following questions, discuss them in your groups and then write the answers.

1. Do you think that the song reflects Van Gogh's attitude and feelings? If so, mention specific verses.
2. How does this song make you feel?
3. Write up to 5 sentences giving facts about Van Gogh's life, based on the song.

- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

5. Browse the following sites and choose 4 or 5 paintings you like most. Spend some time observing these paintings and write down how each one makes you feel. Finally, note down the following information about these paintings.



<http://www.googleartproject.com> (Van Gogh Museum Amsterdam) [www.vangoghmuseum.nl](http://www.vangoghmuseum.nl)

- Title: .....
- Type of painting: .....
- Height: ..... cm Width: ..... cm
- Year it was painted: .....
- Viewing notes: .....

.....

.....

# 4 Vincent van Gogh



6. Match the following paintings with the viewing notes.



1. In the 19th century, absinthe was a popular drink with many, including artists like van Gogh. This still life shows a solitary glass of absinthe on a café table and a bottle of water. Van Gogh combines this with a view through the window. The chosen vantage point makes it feel as though you are yourself sitting at the café table where the painter sat.
2. After months of observing the local peasants' daily routines, van Gogh depicted a family gathered around the table for a modest dinner of the potatoes grown in their own garden. He chose his colors purposefully to connect his sitters with the earth that sustained them. The stark interior, their rough hands, and weather-beaten faces were the legacy of their life of labor. Neither sentimental nor romantic, *The Potato Eaters* expressed the compassionate sincerity of Vincent's aims in art.
3. Van Gogh returned to his earlier panoramic approach to depict the first harvest of the year in *The Harvest*, which he painted in 1888. His deliberate approach to spatial organization -- the crops in the foreground, the fields above, and the mountains on the high horizon -- reveals his desire to attain some epic grandeur.
4. Vincent van Gogh's *Sprig of Flowering Almond Blossom in a Glass* is an oil on canvas. He painted a sprig of an almond branch, which he forced into early flowering in a glass of water. The irregular pattern of the little branch, covered with pale, translucent blooms, gave him a subject that recalled the depiction of flowers in Japanese prints. The simple division of the silvery, violet background with a scarlet band pays tribute to the Japanese aesthetic.
5. Location in the artwork: Paris, France On his trips to the areas around Paris, van Gogh often painted outdoors. This view of the Seine river was also made outside. Quite untypically, van Gogh did not complete this work.
6. When van Gogh arrived in Arles in the south of France from Paris, he was immediately inspired by the vast landscape. He painted this simple farmhouse in a cornfield there and then, partly in thick brushstrokes and partly using little stipples. Van Gogh made a sketch of this landscape in a letter to his brother Theo.

7. Read Vincent Van Gogh's biography and in pairs, answer the questions that follow.

**Year of Birth : 1853**

**Death Year : 1890**

**Country of Origin : Netherlands**

Vincent van Gogh was born in Zundert, Holland. The son of a **pastor**, was brought up in a **religious** and **cultured** atmosphere, a profession that Vincent found **appealing** and to which he would be drawn to a certain extent later in his life. His sister described him as a serious and **introspective** child, highly **emotional** and **lacking self-confidence**.



At age 16 Vincent started to work for an **art dealer** in The Hague. His four years younger brother Theo, with whom Vincent **cherished** a life-long friendship, would join the company later. This friendship is amply documented in a **vast amount** of letters they sent each other.

They provide a lot of **insight into** the life of the painter, and show him to be a talented writer with a **keen** mind. Theo would support Vincent financially throughout his life.

In 1880, Vincent van Gogh followed his brother Theo's suggestion and **took up painting** in earnest. For a brief period Vincent took painting lessons from Anton Mauve in Hague. Although Vincent and Anton soon **split** over **divergence** of artistic views, influences of the Hague School of painting would remain in Vincent's work, **notably** in the way he played with light and in the **looseness of his brush strokes**. However his **usage** of colours, **favouring** dark tones, set him apart from his teacher.

In spring 1886 Vincent van Gogh went to Paris, where he moved in with his brother Theo; they shared a house on Montmartre. Here he met the painters Edgar Degas, Camille Pissarro, Bernard, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Paul Gauguin. He discovered **impressionism** and liked its use of light and color, more than its lack of social engagement (as he saw it). Especially the technique known as **pointillism** (where many small dots are applied to the canvas that **blend** into rich colors only in the eye of the beholder, seeing it from a distance)

**made its mark** on Van Gogh's own style. It should be noted that Van Gogh is regarded as a **post-impressionist**, rather than an impressionist, meaning that the artist uses color and lines to express an emotional response to the subject rather than to describing it accurately.

# 4 Vincent van Gogh

Vincent was an **unstable** and **volatile** man, well known as the 'tortured artist'. His **nervous temperament** made him a difficult companion and night-long discussions combined with painting all day **undermined** his health. He decided to go south to Arles where he hoped his friends would join him and help found a school of art. Gauguin did join him but with **disastrous** results. Near the end of 1888, an incident led Gauguin to ultimately leave Arles, after a number of arguments with Vincent. Van Gogh **pursued** him with an open razor, was stopped by Gauguin, but ended up cutting a **portion** of his own **ear lobe** off.

Van Gogh then began to **alternate** between **fits of madness** and **lucidity** and was sent to the asylum in Saint-Remy suffering with depression. He spent much time in the asylum, though it was later believed that he suffered from epilepsy. While there he painted some 150 paintings. His most famous work *The Starry Night* was painted while staying in the asylum. The only painting he sold during his lifetime, 'The Red Vineyard', was created in 1888. In May 1890 Vincent van Gogh left the clinic and went to the **physician** Paul Gachet, in Auvers-sur-Oise near Paris, where he was closer to Theo, who had recently married. Here van Gogh created the portrait of the melancholic "Dr. Gachet". In two months Van Gogh was averaging one painting per day.

His depression **aggravated**. On July 27 of the same year, at the age of 37, after a fit of painting activity, van Gogh shot himself in the chest. He died two days later, with Theo at his side, who reported his last words as "The sadness will last forever". He was buried at the **cemetery** of Auvers-sur-Oise; Theo unable to come to terms with his brother's death died 6 months later and was buried next to him.

In a short period of ten years Van Gogh made **approximately** 900 paintings. Van Gogh's finest works were produced in less than three years in a technique that grew more and more impassioned in brushstroke, in symbolic and intense color, in surface tension, and in the movement and **vibration** of form and line. Dramatic, lyrically rhythmic, imaginative, and emotional, for the artist was completely **absorbed in** the effort to explain either his struggle against madness or his **comprehension** of the **spiritual essence** of man and nature.

Van Gogh's influence on expressionism, fauvism and early abstraction was enormous, and can be seen in many other aspects of 20th-century art. Vincent's brother's wife collected Vincent's paintings and letters after his death and **dedicated** herself to getting his work the **recognition** it deserved. It would not take long before his fame grew higher and higher. Today, several paintings by Van Gogh **rank** among the most expensive paintings in the world. On March 30, 1987 Van Gogh's painting "Irises" was sold for a record \$53.9 million at Sotheby's, New York. His *Portrait of Doctor Gachet* was sold for \$82.5 million at Christie's, thus establishing a new price record.

As mentioned earlier, Vincent van Gogh was also a passionate letter writer. Of the **countless** letters he wrote to his friends and family more than 800 have been preserved, as well as approximately 80 letters that he received. In one of his letters, he supports that "There are so many people, especially among our pals, who imagine that words are nothing. On the contrary, don't you think, it's as interesting and as difficult to say a thing well as to paint a thing." Van Gogh to Emile Bernard, 19 April 1888.







**A. Put the events in Van Gogh's life in chronological order.**

- ..... Vincent moves to Paris sharing a house with his brother Theo.
- ..... He shoots himself in the chest and dies two days later.
- ..... Vincent starts to work for an art dealer in Hague.
- ..... A portion of his ear lobe was cut off after an incident with Gauguin.
- ..... He takes up painting after his brother's suggestion.
- ..... He was sent to an asylum in Saint Remy for treatment.
- ..... He discovers and appreciates impressionist artists.

**B. Which statements about Van Gogh are true? Put a tick in the boxes.**

- a. He was influenced by his father's profession.
- b. He was able to make his own money from his paintings.
- c. He is not considered to be an impressionist artist.
- d. He was close friends with Paul Gauguin, another famous artist.
- e. He produced a lot of paintings when he was at the asylum.
- f. He managed to sell most of his paintings at high prices.

**C. Read the Biography again and find the answer to the following questions.**

- ◆ What was Vincent's character like?  
.....
- ◆ What events influenced Vincent's artistic style?  
.....
- ◆ What are the main characteristics of his artwork?  
.....
- ◆ Using his last phrase "The sadness will last forever",  
try to explain the reason why he killed himself.  
.....
- ◆ What do you know about "The Portrait of Dr. Gachet"?  
.....



# 4 Vincent van Gogh



D. Now watch the video "Van Gogh - In His Own Words" on youtube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hXMuK5NQEA>).

Single out, note down and discuss two points in Van Gogh's biography or personality which appealed to you most.

.....

.....

.....

.....



E. a. Vincent Van Gogh painted a large number of self-portraits. Watch the following video: <http://videos.howstuffworks.com/discovery/29887-assignment-discovery-van-gogh-video.htm>

Some of these portraits appear below.

Compare them in groups and write two similarities and two differences.

.....

.....

.....

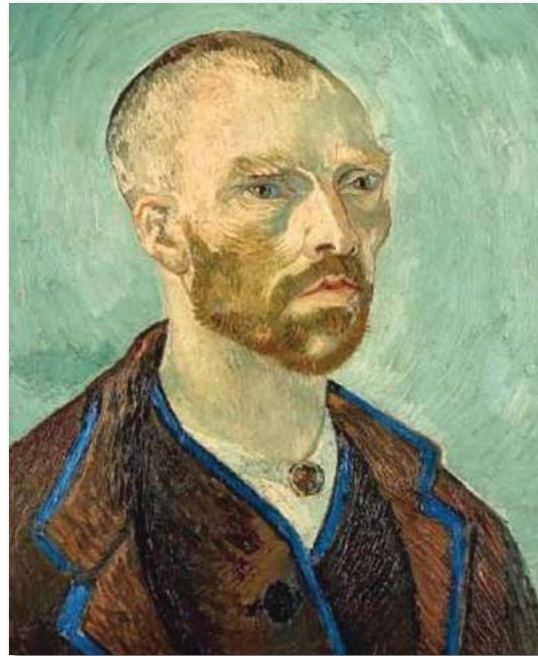
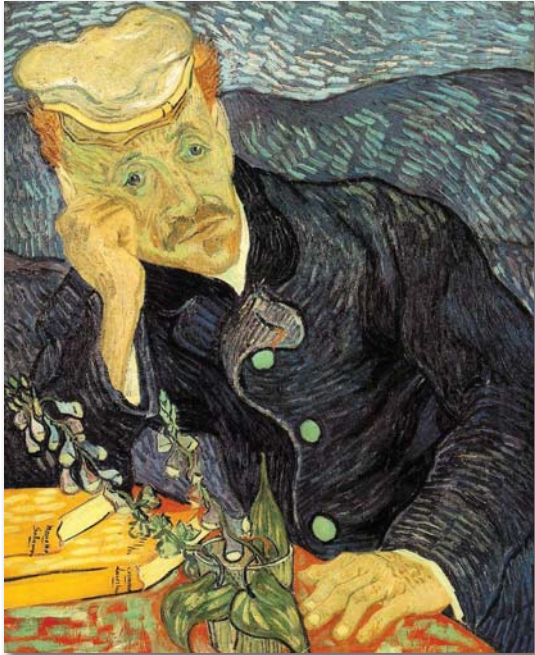
.....

b. Write a caption below each portrait and then choose your group's favourite, explaining why.



.....

F. Based on the work you've done in class and Van Gogh's biography, observe the following paintings for a few minutes and then create an imaginary dialogue between Van Gogh and Dr Gachet.



— .....  
.....



— .....  
.....



— .....  
.....



— .....  
.....



— .....  
.....



— .....  
.....

# 4 Vincent van Gogh

8. The following letter is an extract from one of Van Gogh's letters to his brother Theo Van Gogh.
- Read the extract, take notes and then discuss Van Gogh's feelings for his brother and his family.
  - Underline all the images in the letter. Then using your imagination, try to create a painting of your own.



Isleworth, 7 October 1876

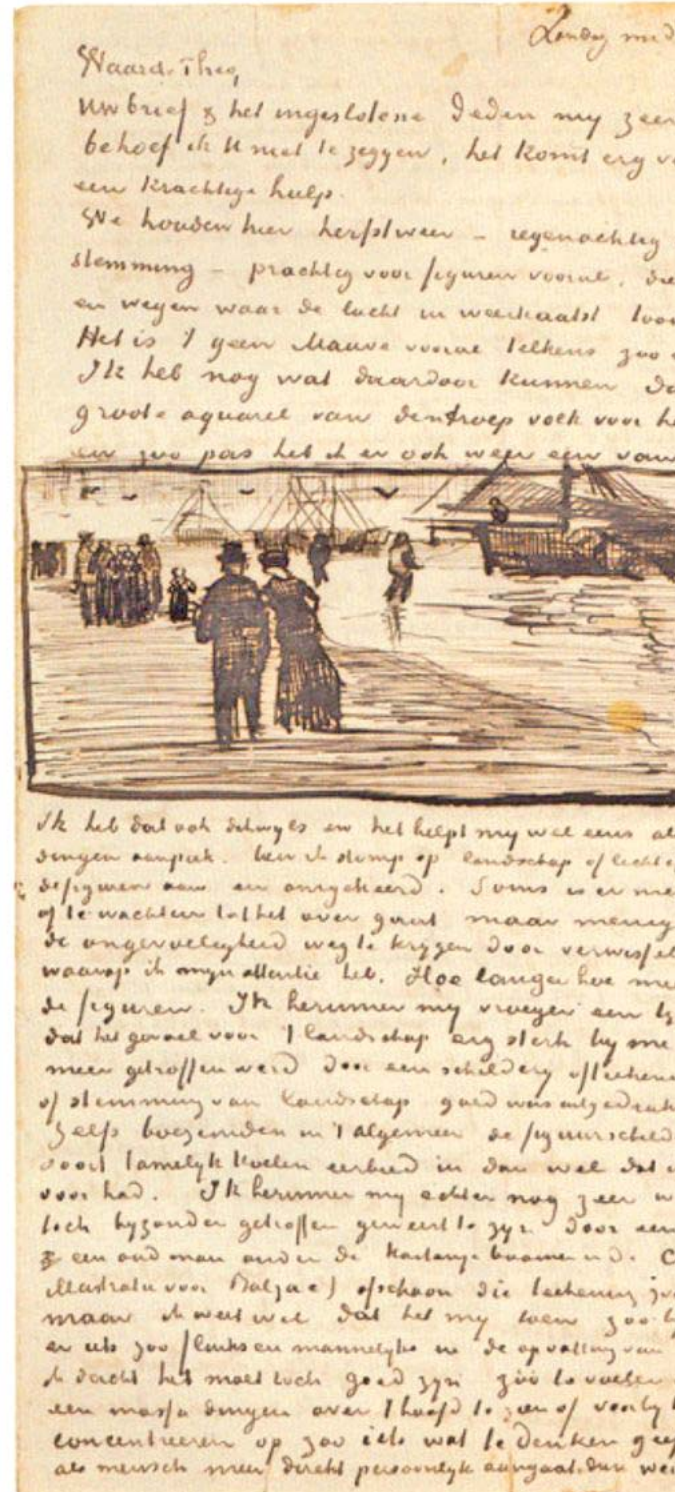
It is Saturday again and I write once more. How I long to see you again, Oh! my longing is sometimes so strong. Write soon, a little word as to how you are.

Last Wednesday we took a long walk to a village an hour's distance from here. The road led through meadows and fields, along hedges of hawthorn, full of blackberries and clematis, and here and there

a large elm tree. It was so beautiful when the sun set behind the grey clouds, and the shadows were long. By chance we met the school of Mr. Stokes, where there are still several of the boys I knew. The clouds retained their red hue long after the sun had set and the dusk had settled over the fields, and we saw in the distance the lamps lit in the village. While I was writing to you, I was called to Mr. Jones, who asked if I would walk to London to collect some money for him. And when I came home in the evening, hurrah, there was a letter from Father with tidings about you. How I should like to be with you both, my boy. And thank God there is some improvement, though you are still weak. And you will be longing to see Mother, and now that I hear that you are going home with her, ...

- c. Here is another extract from the same letter to his brother. Read and discuss Vincent's attitude to life.

"... I have been ill, my mind was tired, my soul disillusioned and my body suffering. I whom God has endowed at least with moral energy and a strong instinct of affection, I fell in the abyss of the most bitter discouragement and I felt with horror how a deadly poison penetrated my stifled heart. I spent three months on the moors, you know that beautiful region where the soul retires within itself and enjoys a delicious rest, where everything breathes calm and peace; where the soul in presence of God's immaculate creation throws off the yoke of conventions, forgets society, and loosens its bonds, with the strength of renewed youth; where each thought takes the form of prayer, where everything that is not in harmony with fresh and free nature quits the heart. Oh, there the tired souls find rest, there the exhausted man regains his youthful strength. So I passed my days of illness ... And then the evening! To be seated before the big fireplace with one's feet in the ashes, one's eyes fixed on a star that sends its ray through the opening in the chimney as if to call me, or absorbed in vague dreams too much to look at the fire, to see the flames rise, flicker, and supplant one another as if desirous to lick the kettle with their tongues of fire, and to think that such is human life: to be born, to work, to love, to grow and to disappear ..."



# 4 Vincent van Gogh

9. Work in groups of four. Bring pictures of Van Gogh's paintings to make a collage.



10. Based on the work you did in class and the notes you've made, write an article for the school newspaper, presenting his life and work from your own point of view. The article will be entitled "My Vincent Van Gogh". There will be prizes for the three best articles.
11. At the computer lab or at home, visit the following website, browse through some of Van Gogh's letters and find out his personal attitude about Art.



<http://www.webexhibits.org/vangogh/>

## FIELD STUDY

- ◆ Organise a class visit to an art gallery. Make groups of four and observe exhibits, focus on detail, discuss techniques, draw sketches, or carry out special Worksheet tasks. Find information about particular works of art. Write reviews about the artists' work, personal feelings or impression. Present your work in your school.