

This graphic novel about the life of Vincent van Gogh can be used in lessons in a variety of ways and is an ideal introduction to a series of lessons about the life and work of one of the Netherlands' most famous artists. For further information about the artist:
www.vangoghmuseum.com

This exercise focuses on the chronology of the events in Vincent's life and places the artist in the correct historical context. Students are given the opportunity to find out about the important events that occurred during Van Gogh's lifetime. The exercise can be used as a starting point for a structured or open discussion.

1853
1854
1855
1856
1857
1858
1859
1860
1861
1862
1863
1864
1865
1866
1867
1868
1869
1870
1871
1872
1873
1874
1875
1876
1877
1878
1879
1880
1881
1882
1883
1884
1885
1886
1887
1888
1889
1890

Atlantic Ocean

Portrait of Karl Marx

Large crowd in a city square

Portrait of a man with a microscope

Man in a suit

Vintage car

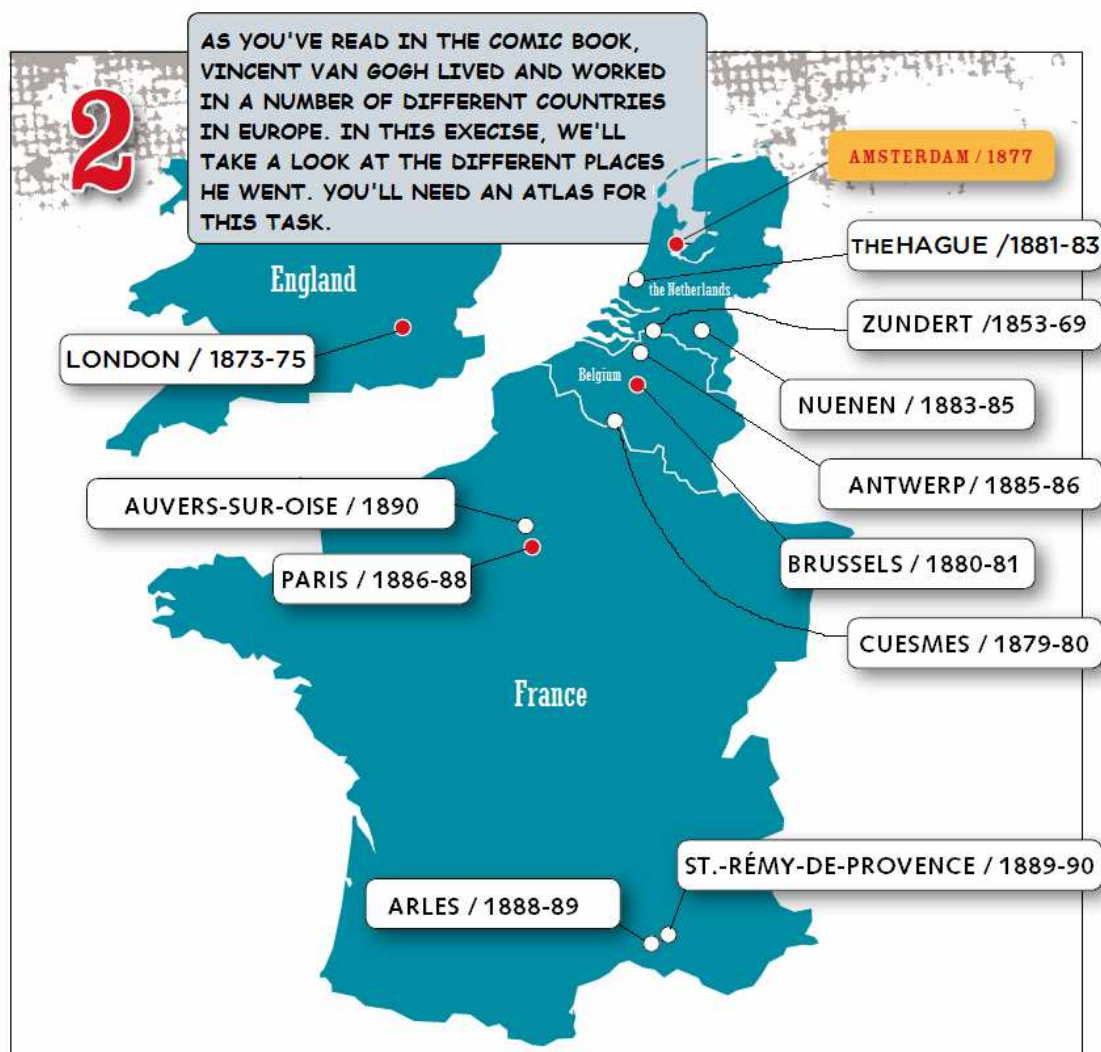
Eiffel Tower

Copyrighted by the University of New England

Exercise 2

This exercise presents a number of the places where Vincent van Gogh lived and worked. Students have to research the correct dates and the most common forms of transport during this period, which should give them an impression of the travel times involved. This exercise also deals with the issue of immigration and links it to current social debate on the subject.

Model answer A. / B.



For The Hague, 1872–73 is also correct. For Zundert: During this period, Van Gogh also went to boarding school in Zevenbergen and Tilburg. For Paris, 1875–1876 is also correct.

C. Vincent could have travelled by train, boat, or horse coach. He often used to go on foot.

D. Own answer. Vincent van Gogh would have needed to secure an income in his new home. He worked (in The Hague, London and Paris between 1872 and 1876, and in a variety of places between 1876 and 1880) and received money from his brother (from around 1880). He would have had to find somewhere to live and become acquainted with his new surroundings and the local language. People who move to a new country nowadays are often required to demonstrate that they have a valid reason for being in

the country and to apply for a residence permit. They may have to do a citizenship test to prove their knowledge of the prevailing local culture and language.

E. Immigrate: to come to a place or country of which one is not a native in order to settle there. Emigrate: to leave one place or country, especially one's native country, to settle in another. Integrate: to join an existing community and adapt to its prevailing culture by, for example, learning the local language and making social connections. Vincent van Gogh worked abroad and lived in France from 1886, but he remained a Dutch citizen and, had he not met his tragic end, he may well have returned to the Netherlands, rather than settling permanently in France.

F. Own answer. Possible points for discussion: Vincent could perhaps be described as an immigrant in France and he certainly integrated into the community: he spoke French and had French friends, which would have helped him to feel more at home in his new country. However, as he was not a permanent resident and was still a Dutch citizen, it is more accurate to say that he simply lived and worked abroad for some time. Nowadays, we might describe Vincent as an expatriate or 'expat', someone who lives outside of their native country, perhaps for work or during their retirement, but this term would be too modern to describe someone who lived during Vincent's lifetime.

Exercise 3

Students gain insight into the people around Vincent van Gogh by making a family tree. Theo, Vincent's younger brother, played a particularly important role in his life, ensuring that his brother had a regular income and moral support. This exercise takes a look at modern social security and benefits in comparison with the provision of financial support and assistance during Vincent's lifetime.

Model answer A.



B. Until 1880, Vincent had a variety of different jobs. He earned his money by working in an art shop (1869–1876) and from 1876 to 1880 his jobs included assistant teacher, bookseller and preacher. Later, Vincent received money from his brother Theo.

C. Own opinion.

D. Theo gave his brother Vincent financial and moral support. He provided for his living costs and also supported him in his decision to work as an artist.

E. Own opinion. Possible answer: Theo loved his brother. He also wanted to make sure that his parents did not need to worry about Vincent. Later, he realised that Vincent had become a good artist and he promoted his brother's work.

F. In the time when Van Gogh lived, people did not receive benefits from the welfare state. They had to rely on themselves and their families and sometimes received support from the church.

G. Own answer.

Exercise 4

This exercise involves comparing the illustrations in the comic book with the original paintings by Vincent van Gogh.

Model answer A.



B. The students provide and justify their own opinions. Similarities and differences that might be mentioned include the use of colour, the style, facial expressions, the light and the background.

Exercise 5

This exercise focuses on Vincent's illness, as presented in the comic book. The exercise could be extended with a discussion about possible reasons for Van Gogh's suicide and encouraging the students to empathise with the troubled artist.

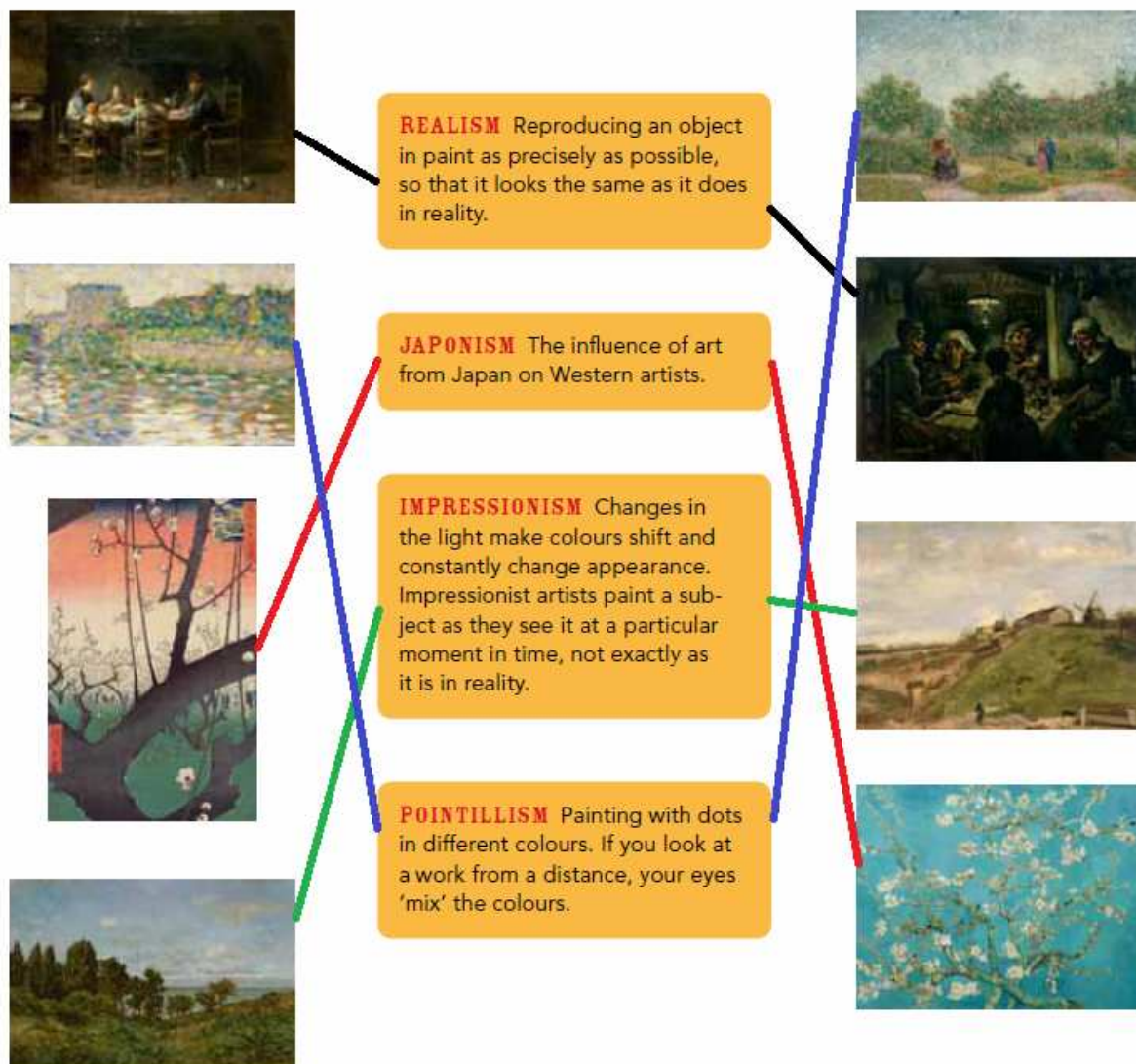
Model answer

A. In the comic book, Vincent wonders if he's mad, but his doctors have told him that he suffers from epilepsy (page 3). Dr. Gachet makes him a remedy for his depression (page 19).

- B.** In some of the illustrations, Vincent sees things that are not there and talks to imaginary figures. The illustrator also shows Vincent's paintings talking to him. On page 16, Vincent sees demons. On page 23, the trees talk to him and he sees figures from his drawings and images from his past. On pages 40 and 41, a number of paintings talk to him. On pages 41 and 42, he sees the gravedigger. Some portraits and artists' materials talk to him on page 44.
- C.** The gravedigger is a figure in one of Vincent's paintings. Vincent painted a portrait of him in The Hague. The gravedigger appears at a critical point in Vincent's life and represents death and sacrifice.
- D.** The gravedigger talks to Vincent about his prospects of fame as an artist.
- E.** The gravedigger promises him recognition if he makes a sacrifice. It will mean that he can make more money and pay back his brother Theo.
- F.** The first sacrifice that Vincent makes in the comic book is to cut off part of his left ear. The second sacrifice is his life.

Exercise 6

Model answer



Exercise 7

This exercise focuses on the monetary value of Van Gogh's art and the reasons why his works are so expensive. Students also consider the price and value of Van Gogh's works during his own lifetime.

Model answer

A. Own opinion. Possible answers: Vincent van Gogh is a famous artist; no new paintings by Vincent will ever be made, because the artist is dead; Vincent's paintings do not come onto the market very often; lots of people would like to own a painting by Van Gogh.

B. Own response. Possible answers: Vincent sold hardly any paintings; Vincent was not very well known and people preferred to buy paintings by famous artists; people were not used to Vincent's work and he did not have many admirers.

C. Own answer. Possibilities: the artist's name; the materials used; the size of the painting; is the painting well known?; is the quality and condition of the painting good?; is the work definitely by that artist?

D. Own opinion. Possible answers: see C.

E. On pages 39 and 44.

Exercise 8

In this exercise, students compare a number of self-portraits of Vincent van Gogh with the figure of Van Gogh in the comic book. They list at least two similarities and two differences. Then the students make their own self-portraits in the style of Vincent van Gogh.

In the lesson, this exercise can lead into a discussion of the way Vincent depicted himself and what thoughts and emotions might have been involved in the creation of these self-portraits.

Model answer

A. Own answer. Possible similarities: Vincent is usually wearing a hat; his hair is a reddish colour; he is dressed in blue; he is depicted painting.

Possible differences: in the comic book we often see Vincent's entire figure, from head to toe, but not in the self-portraits; in the comic book we often see Vincent from different angles, such as from behind; the comic book shows Vincent 'in action'.

B. Student's own work.

Exercise 9

This exercise involves a song inspired by Vincent van Gogh: 'Vincent', by the American singer Don McLean.

Students will need a computer to find the lyrics and listen to the song online. Many online versions are also accompanied by pictures.

In this exercise, students have to process new information and connect it to Van Gogh's work.

They also gain insight into the reasons why the singer wrote a song about this artist and look for works by Van Gogh on the internet.

Model answer

A. Own opinion. Possible answer: Don McLean sings about Vincent in a calm tone that is melancholy, but warm. The lyrics express his admiration for the artist. He says 'this world was never meant for one as beautiful as you'.

B. Own opinion. Possible answer: the singer feels that the world wasn't ready for an artist like Vincent. He thinks that people didn't understand Vincent when he was alive and that he suffered a great deal.

C. Own choice. Possible works:



Starry night (Museum of Modern Art, acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest, New York)

Matches the repeated words 'Starry, starry night...'.
Matches the line 'morning field of amber grain'.



Wheatfield with a reaper (Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam)

Matches the line 'morning field of amber grain'.



Sunflowers (Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam)

Matches 'flaming flowers that brightly blaze'.



Self-portrait (Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam)

Matches 'Vincent's eyes of China blue'. Also 'with eyes that watch the world and can't forget', because his expression is haunted.

Exercise 10

Students choose a painting by Vincent van Gogh and describe it, basing their work on a number of questions.

Model answer

A. Various answers are possible, such as: oil paint on canvas, painted with a brush and palette knife.

B. Own response.

C. Various answers possible.

Here are a number of questions to provide some guidance:

Colour: Which colours did Vincent use? Did he use complementary colour combinations, such as yellow and purple, blue and orange, or red and green? Did he use warm–cold contrasts, such as the warm colours yellow, orange and red, contrasted with the cold colours blue, green and purple?

Composition: What elements can you see in the painting? How are they arranged? Are any 'lines' visible? Is it a diagonal composition? A triangular composition?

Space: How is the space used in the painting? Is there much depth in the work? Is there a horizon? Is there a clear background? Is there a lot going on in the background?

Light: From which side is the light coming? Is there a visible source of light, such as the sun, or an oil lamp, or does the light come from 'outside' the painting? Are there any shadows? Is there a contrast between light and dark?

Form/structure: How was the painting created? Can you see whether the paint has been applied thickly or thinly? Can you see the actual brushstrokes? Is there a certain rhythm or pattern to the brushstrokes?

(This is easiest to answer if the student is able to see the actual work.)

D. Various answers possible.

E. Various answers possible.

F. Own opinion.