

DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS FOR AFTER VIEWING THE VIDEO

VINCENT VAN GOGH

1. SELF PORTRAITS

Vincent van Gogh painted many self-portraits over the 10 years of his painting career. These works show many mood changes, and Van Gogh's use of color and paint helps create these mood changes. Have students draw a self-portrait, looking in the mirror to capture the shapes and sizes of their facial features. If they work on typing paper in pencil and then black pen, you can Xerox several copies of this portrait for each student. Each student can then experiment with the relationship between mood and color and/or technique as they color their portraits in different styles (very textured or scribbled, or smooth and quiet with no strokes showing, etc.) and color palettes (for example: complementary, perhaps orange and blue, monochromatic, etc.)

2. A PASSION FOR NATURE AND COLOR

Although van Gogh suffered from much sadness and loneliness in his life, he created many joyful paintings in which he expresses his love of the beauty in the world. What were some of the influences that led him to a more colorful way of painting? (the Impressionists, Japanese prints, new tube colors of oil paint available) Assemble some real or artificial flowers and have students draw and paint the flowers. Flaked laundry soap or laundry starch can be added to tempera paints to simulate thicker oil paint. Students can work with popsicle sticks as well as brushes to experiment with the thick, active brushwork of Van Gogh. Encourage students to work with a limited palette (a few selected colors) as Van Gogh did.

3. BEDROOM AT ARLES

Look at Van Gogh's painting, *Bedroom at Arles*. How do you think Van Gogh felt about his bedroom? How do you feel about your room at home? Are there special things you've put in your room to make it feel personal? (posters on walls, collections of things, pets, your own artwork, choice of color on walls or bedspread, music, computer or other electronic items, etc.)

Give students a chance to draw their own bedroom, attempting to express their feelings about it as they details and color. Or, they can recreate a version of Van Gogh's painting, perhaps with a few additions or updates.

4. STARRY NIGHTS

Have you ever been outside, in the countryside, on a beautiful summer night, and looked up into a starry sky? What are the feelings you have had or might have doing this? What sounds would you hear on such a night? What smells might you smell?

Did Van Gogh create a realistic night sky? What does it remind you of?

Have students create a starry, swirling night sky in the manner of Van Gogh on large sheets of dark paper using oil pastels or tempera paints in pale colors. Quiet, lyrical music may inspire the work in large strokes and circular motions.

5. DEAR THEO

Theo, Vincent's loving brother, gave him both encouragement and money. Their many letters to one another are important and famous. For homework, ask your students to write a letter to an imaginary brother, "Theo." This letter should be about some topic that is personal, but that students do not mind sharing with the class. Perhaps they are asking this "Theo" for help in some way, as Vincent did so often. Have students include at least one sketch in the letter.