

Vincent van Gogh, *Starry Night*, 1889  
Post-Impressionism – painting



**Key Facts:**

**Artist:** Vincent van Gogh was a Dutch artist who lived from 1853 to 1890. After failing at being a preacher and art dealer, van Gogh found painting. In his short life, van Gogh painted around 860 paintings (all during the last 10 years of his life). He wasn't well known during his life, but now he is one of the most famous artists in the world.

**Art period/style:** Post-Impressionism, 1886-1905

**Key characteristics of that period:** Post-Impressionist artists used vivid colors and thick brushstrokes. They chose real-life subject matter and worked expressively- using bold colors and distorted forms to express emotions.

**Techniques:** Van Gogh is known for impasto: thick brush strokes. With impasto, the paint is applied very thick, so that it is raised from the canvas. His paintings are easy to recognize by the pulsing/swirling motion.

## The Five Core Habits:

Practice the *Five Core Habits of Grammar* with art - NAMES (found on pgs. 18-19 in the Foundation Guide). Part of teaching is learning to ask a student good questions. This is a great activity for looking at art! Plus, you get to sneak in a little art history and technique along with.

### 5 CORE HABITS



#### NAMING

1. What do you call this?
2. Where does this name come from?
3. Are there any other names for this?



#### ATTENDING

1. What are the parts of this?
2. Where do you usually see this?
3. What makes this special?



#### MEMORIZING

1. What would help you memorize this? An acronym, a song, a chant, a picture, etc.
2. What did you already know about this?



#### EXPRESSING

1. Could you draw a picture of this or write a song about it? Could you act it out?
2. How does this make you feel?



#### STORYTELLING

1. Can you tell me a story about this?
2. Can I tell you a story about this?

N names (name things specifically)

A attending (look and listen carefully. Also- taste, smell, touch. Compare things.)

M memorizing (soak up facts and ideas. Memorize facts and relations of things to recall, connect, and expand new ideas to older ones from past memorizations.)

E expressing (express ideas creatively- reciting, drawing, singing, dancing)

S storytelling (hear and tell stories)

This helps us grasp the basic elements, vocabulary, and rules of any subject, and helps us progress more quickly toward comprehension and creativity in future studies.

Using the image on the first page, go through these questions:

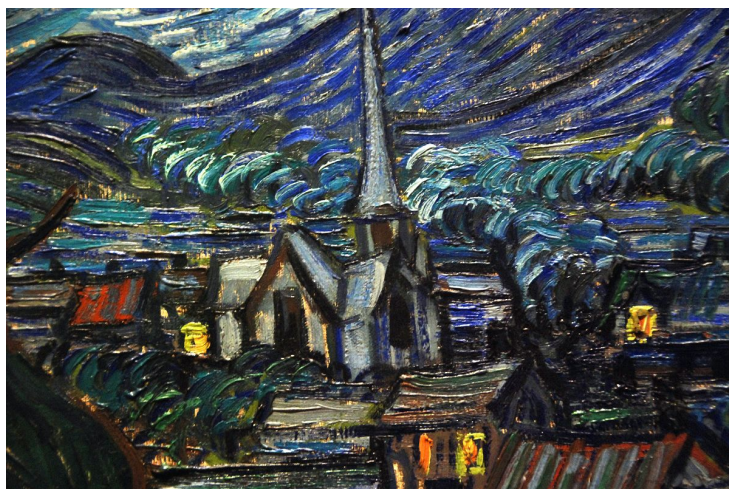
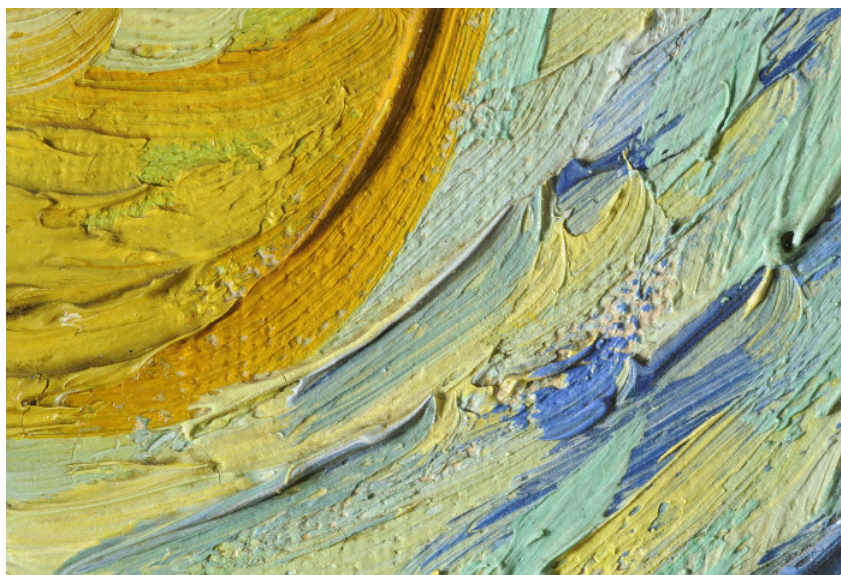
#### N – Names:

- Name the artist, era/art style, and technique.
- What can you find? Name the things you see.
- How many stars are there?
- What do you notice in the village?
- What colors do you see?

#### A – Attending

- What do you see?
- What emotions does this painting give you?
- What do you imagine hearing, smelling, touching?
- How is color used?
- How did he show the sky? Stars? Moon?
- What forms stick out to you?
- Notice the texture of the trees.

Attending to details – here is a close-up. What else do you notice now?  
Can you see the thick impasto brush strokes now?



## **M – Memorize**

Memorize the artist, time period, and facts about the artwork/technique.

## **E – Express**

Express your thoughts and ideas about the art.

You can also express by trying the technique on your own.

It is a fun exercise to try painting your own *Starry Night*! You just need a canvas, brushes, and some acrylic paint. We sketched the shapes onto the canvases for the student ahead of time so they could focus on color and thick, swirling brushstrokes.





### **S – Story telling**

Tell the story about this work of art.  
Refer to image on first page.

*Starry Night* is one of the most iconic or famous paintings in the world. It was painted a year before van Gogh died. This painting was inspired by the view from his window at the Saint-Paul-de-Mausole asylum in Saint-Rémy, France. This was a mental hospital where he spent 12 months at the end of his life recovering from his mental illnesses.

This landscape painting is loaded with emotions and symbolism. There is an energetic sky, a peaceful village below, rolling hills in the background, and a large cypress tree in the foreground. Van Gogh used

exaggerated and expressive brushstrokes to visualize his emotions. The night sky has whirling clouds, shining stars, and a bright moon. The swirling brushstrokes guide the viewer's eye around the painting.

The village is peaceful in comparison to the dramatic night sky. The church steeple dominates the village and symbolizes unity in the town and gives an impression of isolation. The prominence of the church, with the tall steeple, may refer to his own faith and hope. The bright lights of the stars shining down over the dark landscape may also convey feelings of hope. In 1888, Van Gogh wrote a personal letter which described; "a great starlit vault of heaven... one can only call God."

The prominent cypress tree in the foreground of the painting has symbolic meaning also. Cypress trees are evergreen trees that are often found in cemeteries. So, these trees might remind us of death, but these evergreens are symbolic for eternal life. Many believe that this tree was symbolic for van Gogh's eventual suicide. But on the other side, the tree connects the earth and the sky, connecting it to the heavens. So, this might have been a symbol for hope.