Van Gogh
AND
Gauguin

The Art Institute of Chicago
Van Gogh
AND
Gauguin

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In conjunction with the exhibition
Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Studio of the South

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Van Gogh and Gauguin

The Studio of the South

September 22, 2001 – January 13, 2002

This major exhibition, organized by The Art Institute of Chicago and the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, presents approximately 130 paintings, ceramics, and drawings that bring to life the dramatic friendship of Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin before, during, and after they lived and worked together in Arles, France, for a brief, but explosive, time in 1888. The story of the remarkable relationship between these masters of modern art is one of rivalry and collaboration, alienation and affection, madness and genius. Together, they evolved ambitious plans to reinvigorate French art through what they called the Studio of the South, symbolized by a sunflower.

This manual highlights works of art from The Art Institute of Chicago’s permanent collection on view in the exhibition. The manual is designed as a lasting reference to the museum’s Post-Impressionist collection.

Six of the seven slides and the four postcard images included in this manual depict works of art on display in the exhibition (slide 6, Paul Gauguin, The Big Tree, 1891, is not included in the exhibition).

Six books are being published in conjunction with this exhibition.

Artists in Focus: Vincent van Gogh
By Belinda Thomson

Artists in Focus: Paul Gauguin
By Britt Salvesen, with Douglas W. Druick and Peter Kort Zegers
Each focus book features works in the Art Institute's permanent collection, presented as full-color plates and accompanied by accessible, biographical essays.

**Sunflowers**

By Debra N. Mancoff

An examination of the sunflower in art from the 16th through the early 20th century, this book presents glorious images, together with lively descriptions of the sunflower's evolving symbolism and aesthetic significance. Beginning with botanical texts and concluding with van Gogh's famous paintings, *Sunflowers* is a visually and historically engaging survey.

**Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Studio of the South**

By Douglas W. Druick and Peter Kort Zegers in collaboration with Britt Salvesen; with contributions to the text by Kristin Hoermann Lister and the assistance of Mary C. Weaver

This catalogue, written by the curators of the exhibition, can be used as both a reference tool for scholars of 19th-century art and a lavish record of the exhibition.

**Highlights of the Exhibition**

**Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Studio of the South**

By Debra N. Mancoff with contributions by Douglas W. Druick and Peter Kort Zegers

This book is intended to appeal to visitors who wish to take something with them as a remembrance of the exhibition. The text highlights the story of the two artists' relationship, focuses on critical issues relating to their interactions, and includes 50 evocative and striking color reproductions.

**The Yellow House: Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin Side by Side**

By Susan Goldman Rubin with illustrations by Jos. A. Smith

The first children's book produced in conjunction with an Art Institute exhibition is for readers ages 9 through 12. It tells the fascinating story of the collaboration between van Gogh and Gauguin and is illustrated with original watercolors and with reproductions of paintings. *The Yellow House* brings to life Arles and the two artists who created some of the greatest works there.
“I am thinking about Gauguin a lot, and I am sure that... he and I will like practically the same subjects... and I am convinced that he would fall in love with the country down here.”

Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890) and Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) are two of the most well-known artists of the late 19th century. Each artist produced a significant body of work that includes paintings, drawings, prints, and in Gauguin’s case, sculpture and ceramics. Both left behind written documents and extensive correspondence that detail the concerns and processes of their working lives and give us insight into astonishingly creative minds. Yet neither would be the artist we know today were it not for a brief period of time in which they befriended one another and worked together.

The two artists met in November 1887 in Paris, confirmed their friendship by an exchange of paintings, and began an ongoing correspondence after Gauguin left for Brittany on France’s northwest coast. Shortly thereafter, van Gogh also left Paris, but he went to the south of France where he soon saw the fruitful possibilities of collaboration: he envisioned a shared working environment in Arles with its vibrant light and color, which he dubbed the Studio of the South. To this intended artists’ haven van Gogh planned to invite painters such as Gauguin, Georges Seurat (1859–1891), and Émile Bernard (1868–1941). Here they would share expenses, profits, artistic philosophies, and most importantly, an environment away from the hustle and bustle of modern Paris.

Gauguin and van Gogh followed very different paths en route to their shared experience at Arles. Born in Paris in 1848, Gauguin spent part of his childhood on his great-uncle’s estate in Peru, an experience that he would regard as crucial to his artistic identity. As a young man he became a sailor, traveling with the merchant marines and the French navy. In the early 1870s, he left the military and took a position at a brokerage firm in Paris. Soon he met and married Mette Gad, a Danish woman, and started a family. Through

friends, Gauguin became acquainted with the Impressionist Camille Pissarro (1831–1903), who encouraged him in his efforts to draw and paint. When the stock market collapsed in 1882, Gauguin determined to make a living as an artist. Wanting to distance himself from the work of Georges Seurat and the other Neo-Impressionists in Paris, Gauguin eventually made his way to Brittany. Here he soon found himself at the center of an artistic colony in the midst of beautiful scenery and among the Breton people who held fast to their regional folk customs. It was at this time, while painting the peasants in their traditional costumes, that Gauguin began to formulate his belief that his creativity emerged not within decadent Parisian society but from his more primitive side.

Van Gogh was born in Holland in 1853. He was the son of a preacher of the Dutch Reformed Church. When he was old enough to work, van Gogh turned to his uncle Vincent, who invited the young man to work first in London and then in Paris for a firm of art dealers. After failing in his uncle’s business and later in theology school and as a lay minister in Belgium’s rugged coalmining district, van Gogh in 1881 decided to devote his energies to becoming an artist. His younger brother Theo, who took Vincent’s place at the Paris art gallery, supported the artist both emotionally and financially for the rest of his life. Thus freed from the responsibility of making a living, van Gogh first taught himself to draw from instruction manuals and by copying engravings. He studied in the Netherlands for short periods of time with Anton Mauve (1838–1888), a cousin who was an artist, and in a studio in The Hague. In 1886 he went to Antwerp where he first saw the work of Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), and in that year he moved to Paris where he also studied for a few months in the well-known atelier of Fernand Cormon. In Paris he viewed firsthand the works of painters he admired for their use of color, notably Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863). He also encountered modern paintings made by his contemporaries, the Impressionists (such as Camille Pissarro and Claude Monet [1840–1926]) and the Neo-Impressionists (such as Georges Seurat and Paul Signac [1863–1935]). Van Gogh’s Paris pictures, including his Self-Portrait (slide 1), reveal his absorption of current theories regarding the application of complementary colors.

By late 1887, tired of the climate and congestion of Paris and seeking an environment in which he could further pursue his studies in color, van Gogh decided to move to Provence in southern France. Several months after
settling in the town of Arles in February of 1888, van Gogh invited his friend Gauguin to join him to initiate the Studio of the South. He settled into the Yellow House, adjacent to a public square at the town’s northern end, all the while corresponding with Gauguin, who was living and painting in Brittany. Van Gogh painted works that evoked the sun-drenched environment of Provence and hung them in the Yellow House to welcome Gauguin.

Many important writers hailed from this Provençal region, such as Renaissance poet Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374) who directly inspired van Gogh’s The Poet’s Garden (slide 2). Contemporary poet Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869) was a prominent citizen of Arles; as a government member, he helped secure the town’s position on the Lyon-to-Marseille railway line in the wake of the 1848 revolution. Place Lamartine, a public park directly across the street from van Gogh’s yellow house, was named in his honor.

Van Gogh produced numerous works during the summer, including paintings of his Yellow House (postcard A) and a garden in the adjacent Place Lamartine, which he titled The Poet’s Garden for its symbolic interpretation of his friendship with Gauguin, which he hoped would emulate the friendship of the 14th-century poets Petrarch and Giovanni Boccaccio. In a letter, van Gogh proposed to Gauguin that they exchange self-portraits; to this Gauguin responded with Self-Portrait (Les Misérables) (postcard C). Showing himself as an outsider akin to the character of fugitive Jean Valjean in Victor Hugo’s 1862 novel Les Misérables, Gauguin proclaimed his distance from Parisian artistic circles. Gauguin provided van Gogh with insight into this Self-Portrait (Les Misérables): “The line of the eyes and nose, reminiscent of the flowers in a Persian carpet, epitomize the idea of an abstract symbolic style.” Such an assertion was far from both the Impressionists’ adherence to observed nature and the Neo-Impressionists’ scientific application of color.

In May 1888, van Gogh invited Gauguin to join him in Arles. At first reluctant, Gauguin finally agreed, spurred on by Theo’s generous offer to pay for his transportation from Brittany as well as living expenses at Arles in exchange for paintings for Theo’s gallery. In anticipation of Gauguin’s arrival in the fall of 1888, van Gogh produced a painting of his bedroom, sending a sketch of the work in a letter to Gauguin. Van Gogh wrote to his brother that “here color is to do everything, and giving by its simplification a grander

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style to things, is to be suggestive here of rest or of sleep in general." For van Gogh, the complementary colors in The Bedroom (slide 3) demonstrated the emotional and expressive possibilities of color.

Gauguin finally arrived in Arles on October 23, 1888, and the two began painting immediately. Just as he had been taken by the Breton peasants in their traditional garb, Gauguin was drawn to the "Grecian beauty" of the local women and painted them in a composition titled Arlésiennes (Mistral) (slide 5). As the artists worked side by side, differences in temperament as well as working process and philosophy began to surface. Gauguin wrote at this time: "[Van Gogh] is a romantic, while I am more of a primitive." With discord between the two artists threatening the future of the Studio of the South, van Gogh embarked on a series of portraits of the family of Joseph Roulin, the Arles postman and friend of the artist. In Madame Roulin Rocking the Cradle (La Berceuse) (slide 4), the artist presents an image of maternal comfort as much through the coordination of reds and greens as through the rope she holds which rocks an unseen cradle. Before van Gogh finished the work, the two artists had their worst quarrel on December 23, 1888. Van Gogh subsequently mutilated his ear, Gauguin departed for Paris after notifying Theo of Vincent’s condition, and the dream of the Studio of the South had shattered.

From here the lives of the two artists took dramatically different turns. By May of 1889, van Gogh had voluntarily hospitalized himself at the asylum in nearby Saint-Rémy de Provence where he remained for a year. During the winter, he returned to the subject of sunflowers (postcard C). He imagined La Berceuse as part of a triptych, with sunflower paintings flanking it on either side. As his health continued to degenerate, van Gogh’s hope for a consoling art represented by the bright yellow sunflowers and the rocked cradle seemed to dim. However he continued to paint during this difficult period, completing some of his best-known masterpieces such as The Starry Night (1889, Museum of Modern Art, New York) and Road with Cypress and Star (1890, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, The Netherlands). Settled in Auvers outside of Paris in 1890, depressed and ill, on July 27, the artist shot himself and he died two days later with Theo at his side.

From Arles, Gauguin went to Paris and then Brittany. In 1891, he realized a longtime goal to commune with his "primitive" side when he journeyed to

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2 Salvesen, 26.
the island of Tahiti in the South Pacific to establish a Studio of the Tropics. There, he absorbed the exotic locale and evoked the colorful inhabitants in landscape paintings such as *The Big Tree* (slide 6) and figural works such as *Ancestors of Tehamana* (*Merahi Metua No Tehamana*) (slide 7). After a brief, unsuccessful period home in France, Gauguin departed once again for Tahiti in 1895 and enjoyed several prolific years as a painter, printmaker, and writer. He left Tahiti in 1901 for the Marquesas, islands approximately 1,000 miles northeast of Tahiti, and settled on the island of Hivaoa where he died on May 3, 1903, and is buried.

The nine-week period van Gogh and Gauguin spent together in Arles was crucial to the artistic identity of each. They came to the south to distance themselves from Parisian society and from current tendencies in art. Their joint effort to realize van Gogh’s dream of a Studio of the South where they would create a new art afforded the opportunity to share ideas and exchange painting techniques. Van Gogh experimented with Gauguin’s preferred method of painting from the imagination. In turn, Gauguin attempted to paint directly from nature without using preparatory sketches. Their increased use of strong outline and expressionistic color, their lack of modeling and interest in depicting visionary experiences were breakthroughs in the origins of Fauvism, Cubism, and Expressionism. That their dream of a Studio of the South ultimately failed does not diminish the impact of their shared experience. Their trials in forging a new art laid the groundwork for *Henri Matisse* (1869–1954), *Georges Braque* (1889–1963), *Pablo Picasso* (1881–1973), and other innovators of the 20th century.
Prior to moving to Arles, van Gogh lived with his brother Theo in Paris for two years (March 1886–February 1888). Using himself as a readily available model, van Gogh followed in the footsteps of many other artists (Albrecht Dürer [1471–1528], Rembrandt van Rijn [1606–1669], and Gustave Courbet [1819–1877], to name a few) and took a probing look at himself through his painting. Artists use self-portraiture for many reasons; for some, it is a means of studying character, for others, a demonstration of both technical and social status. Van Gogh produced at least 24 self-portraits during this two-year period. They range from images of an uncertain artist portrayed in dark, somber colors, to brightly colored portrayals of confidence, to representations of ideas.

Although using the traditional portrait bust format, this intense, introspective image conveys a thoroughly modern spirit; it is van Gogh’s most methodical application of the Neo-Impressionist style; utilizing techniques practiced by Georges Seurat and Paul Signac. Van Gogh’s use of color in this self-portrait reflects his keen awareness of the Neo-Impressionist practice of juxtaposing complementary colors in order to create a more vibrant effect. Van Gogh, however, rejected Seurat’s and Signac’s uniform Pointillist style and applied the paint in marks of varying size and direction depending on the object depicted. Here, smooth, layered directional strokes define the planes of his face and texture of his hair and beard in a circular pattern while short, choppy strokes unite the clothing and background.
The artist established red-green as the dominant color contrast throughout the painting, seen in his beard and hair (where green and rust-colored strokes are laid down side by side), his eyes (painted green, surrounded by reddish touches delineating the eyelids), and the background (where greens and blues are accented by dabs of orange-red). More muted is the deep violet and gold contrast apparent in his jacket. Finally, the artist plays off the orange strokes of his beard with the light blue of his tie. By subordinating these secondary contrasts to the dominant red-green pair, the portrait retains an overall color harmony.

This self-portrait exhibits van Gogh’s belief that form and meaning can be conveyed through juxtaposing bright colors. Thus, it made sense that when he decided to leave Paris the artist chose Arles as his destination, since its warm climate and brilliant light continually inflect nature’s colors. He readily associated color in nature with color in art as he wrote Theo in the spring of 1888:

This country seems to me as beautiful as Japan as far as….the gay color effects are concerned. Water forms patches of a beautiful emerald or a rich blue in the landscape, just as we see it in the crêpons. The sunsets have a pale orange color which makes the fields appear blue. The sun a splendid yellow. And all this though I have not seen the country yet in its usual summer splendor.\(^1\)

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On February 20, 1888, van Gogh arrived in the southern Provençal town of Arles, France. With the financial help of his brother Theo, he was able to rent, furnish, and ultimately move into the Yellow House (postcard A) in September. Van Gogh’s second-floor bedroom looked directly over Place Lamartine, a small public park that served as a lush oasis amidst the active town of Arles. This painting depicts the garden’s southeast section as confirmed by the appearance of the pale blue-purple belfry of the medieval church of Sainte Trophime just visible past the foliage in the background.

In a letter written around mid-September, van Gogh states that he has just created a painting of “a corner of a garden with a weeping tree, grass, round clipped cedar shrubs and an oleander bush...there is a citron sky over everything, and also the colors have the richness and intensity of autumn.”* This serene, sunny landscape was the first of a four-painting series destined as a décoration—a series of linked pictures—for the bedroom Gauguin would occupy in the Yellow House. With Gauguin’s bedroom as its destination, this series enabled van Gogh to engage in an ongoing dialogue with his potential collaborator. In their letters the two artists exchanged ideas, questions, and artistic philosophies; the Poet’s Garden paintings became visual manifestations of the letters’ words.

The garden’s vitality, from its unkempt grass to its thriving trees, is conveyed by van Gogh’s repetitive brushstrokes and his use of thick impasto. Seasons

appear to change before our eyes from the lush greens of summer to the crisp deep golds of fall. The “citron” sky consists of layered horizontal strokes of yellow and lime, giving the sky both solidity and vibrancy. Rather than focusing on the optical effect of juxtaposed complementary colors, here van Gogh seems to be more interested in the total effect of a more limited range of colors.

By calling the painting *The Poet’s Garden*, van Gogh intentionally linked the image to the 14th-century poets Francesco Petrarch (1304–1374) and Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375), about whom he had been reading in a recently published article on Italian Renaissance literature. Van Gogh’s thoughts dwelt on Petrarch because he recalled that the poet had lived in nearby Avignon. As the artist wrote, “What I wanted was to paint the garden in such a way that one would think of the old poet from here (or rather from Avignon), Petrarch, and at the same time of the new poet living here—Paul Gauguin…” In other words, van Gogh hoped that his artistic partnership with Gauguin would parallel the passionate, spiritual, and intellectual mentor-student relationship shared by the earlier poets. Van Gogh envisioned himself as Boccaccio, tutored by the older poet-artist, Gauguin.

Further symbolic associations may be found in van Gogh’s inclusion of the oleander bush, the scraggly limbs of the weeping tree, and the upright cypress tree. Van Gogh attached meaning to the painting based on personal and conventional symbols: for him, the oleander bush was symbolic of Boccaccio and of hope that the new collaboration of the two painters would be fruitful; the “weeping” tree expressed mourning and loss; while the cypress was a symbol of death and immortality. Such symbolic imagery conveys van Gogh’s doubts and fears that Gauguin would not come to Arles, and that they would never realize the dream of a Studio of the South. His fears, however, were allayed as the new poet (Gauguin) arrived in Arles to stay in his own bedroom overlooking Place Lamartine’s “Poet’s Garden” approximately one month later.

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After having painted five large canvases in one week, an exhausted Vincent wrote to Theo in mid-October (1888), “I have been and still am nearly half-dead from the past week’s work. I cannot do any more yet, and besides, there is a very violent mistral that raises clouds of dust which whiten the trees on the plain from top to bottom.”

To rest from the dusty outdoors, which exacerbated his eye strain, van Gogh worked indoors. Two days later, a rested, yet weary-eyed van Gogh painted the first of three paintings of his own bedroom.

My eyes are still tired, but then I had a new idea in my head…This time it’s just simply my bedroom, only here color is to do everything, and giving by its simplification a grander style to things, is to be suggestive here of rest or of sleep in general. In a word, to look at the picture ought to rest the brain rather than the imagination.

Van Gogh depicted this intimate, simple space with a vivid palette that includes pale violet, red, yellow of fresh butter, light greenish-citron, green, orange, blue, and violet. In actuality, the walls of the room were whitewashed with lime, and the floor was paved with red tile although the brushstrokes give the tile the appearance of wood. “Instead of trying to reproduce exactly what I have before my eyes, I use color more arbitrarily in order to express myself forcibly.” Van Gogh’s use of color as a tool to express ideas and feelings rather than conveying a literal representation reveals his intent to use color as an expressive element in and of itself. Maintaining his interest in the effect of complementary colors, van Gogh included all
three pairs of complementary colors (red and green, yellow and violet, blue and orange) to achieve chromatic equilibrium that he felt conveyed a sense of restful calm. Explaining this concept to Gauguin he wrote, “By means of all these very diverse tones I have wanted to express an absolute restfulness.” Here the bright colors and dramatic **perspective** of the floor, bed, and walls help to draw the viewer into the room.

These distortions in perspective have often been interpreted as evidence of van Gogh’s disturbed psychological state. However, they may also refer to the actual shape and architectural format of the bedroom itself (see figure 1). We know that the far wall, containing the window flanked by the mirror and painted landscape, is at an angle and not parallel to the opposite wall. One could argue that van Gogh was faithfully recording the bedroom’s unusual shape. Here, his bed overlaps the doorframe and appears to loom and thrust itself toward the viewer. Situated between a staircase and Gauguin’s bedroom, van Gogh’s room was much smaller than Gauguin’s adjacent three-windowed room. But, while each man had his own sleeping quarters, they were anything but private. Gauguin had to go through van Gogh’s bedroom each time he wanted to access his own.

Notwithstanding the effect of the highly saturated colors and the room’s apparent distortions, van Gogh shows us an empty, orderly, and realistic living space. Its contents are fundamental to a simple bedroom—a bed, a dressing table, chairs, and a mirror. The thick brushstrokes appear to recreate materials and textures in a realistic manner—they radiate from the center of each chair to leave the impression of the caning of the straw seat, and they follow the horizontal and vertical striations found in the wood grain of the bed frame.

In addition to pairing complementary colors, van Gogh further emphasizes harmony in *The Bedroom* through its arrangement. There are two pillows, two Japanese prints, two portraits (an unidentified self-portrait and an unknown blonde woman), and two chairs that create a hospitable and open center space—a welcoming space that would inspire two artists to leave their mark on the Studio of the South.

While van Gogh often replicated the same subject (e.g. his *Sunflowers* series [postcard B] and his *Poet’s Garden* series [slide 2]), to create a decorative

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scheme for the Yellow House in Arles, the rationale behind his creation of multiple versions of *The Bedroom* differs. The first version (now owned by the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam) was painted in October 1888 just prior to Gauguin's visit to Arles. Seven months later, Vincent sent the painting to his brother, but once it arrived, Theo reported that it had been damaged by excessive humidity. Theo sent the painting back to Vincent so that he could copy it (in case it could not be mended) before returning it to Paris for repair. In September 1889, at *Saint-Rémy* where he was recovering from a psychiatric episode, van Gogh completed the copy (slide 3—the Art Institute's painting). Even though he had his original painting to work from, van Gogh also had to rely on his memory of the bedroom. A third, smaller copy, originally intended for his sister and mother and now in the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, was also painted during his time in Saint-Rémy. While all three paintings of the artist's bedroom depict the same arrangement of furniture, van Gogh revealed his interest in the expressive properties of color by varying it in each picture.
During his time in Arles, van Gogh painted a range of subjects from the harvesting of the fields to local nightlife. He also depicted his friends, in particular members of the Roulin family. In December of 1888, van Gogh began a portrait of Madame Roulin (born Augustine-Alix Pellicot), the wife of the artist's close friend, postman Joseph Roulin. By March 1889 he had completed four additional versions. This version (slide 4) is probably the second in the series and was probably intended for Gauguin. In contrast to his rationale behind creating three versions of his bedroom (slide 3), van Gogh painted five images of Madame Roulin as La Berceuse because he wanted to "ensure the availability of his best work to all who might want it."  

Conceiving the painting as part of a triptych to send to Gauguin after they separated, van Gogh intended La Berceuse to be flanked by two paintings of sunflowers (postcard 2). In a May 1889 letter to Theo, Vincent sketched this arrangement, explaining "the yellow and orange tones of the head will gain in brilliance by the proximity of the yellow wings. And then you will understand what I wrote you, that my idea had been to make a sort of decoration..."

Van Gogh's ongoing interest in complementary color schemes is evident in the juxtaposition of Madame Roulin's bright, emerald-green skirt and

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dark, olive bodice in contrast to her orange hair, rust-colored chair, and vermilion floor. His pairing of red and green is enhanced by the lively floral wallpaper, derived from a self-portrait by Gauguin, (postcard C) which echoes the further variations on this complementary color scheme and adds blue and orange accents. The heavily patterned background also makes the solid planes of color that comprise the floor and Madame Roulin’s body appear to be flat. Van Gogh varies his brushstrokes throughout, from the curving linear strokes forming the figure’s contour and the wallpaper design to short directional hatchings that define her face, hair, and the flowers. The variable color and brushstroke keep the viewer’s eye actively moving around the composition.

Van Gogh painted the words “La Berceuse” on the arm of Madame Roulin’s chair. When describing the painting’s title van Gogh wrote, “I call it ‘La Berceuse’...or...quite simply ‘our lullaby or the woman rocking the cradle.” Van Gogh’s use of the subtitle “La Berceuse” (a French word with multiple meanings including: a woman who rocks an infant; rocking chair; cradle that rocks; lullaby) is entirely appropriate, given the inclusion of a rope to rock the unseen cradle and Madame Roulin’s role as a mother of three children, including six-month-old Marcelle. Seated in a rustic armchair, Madame Roulin gazes off into the distance. Her hands overlap one another as they lightly grasp the coarse rope that rises from the bottom edge of the painting.

Van Gogh’s reference to the painting as “La Berceuse” goes beyond Madame Roulin’s literal action of rocking a cradle. Similar to many subjects he portrayed, such as The Poet’s Garden (slide 2) and Sunflowers (postcard B), the image of a cradle being rocked also held strong symbolic value of nurture and support. Although the symbolism is intended to be universal it springs initially from the artist’s personal experience. Gauguin’s stories about his days sailing around the world from 1868 to 1870 as a “pilot’s apprentice” (officer’s candidate) in the merchant marines intrigued van Gogh. He was also inspired by Pierre Loti’s 1886 novel Icelandic Fishermen that tells the tale of long-haul fishermen and their homesick thoughts after spending lengthy periods of time away from home. Van Gogh felt that this consoling image of a mother would be perfectly suited for the fishermen’s sleeping quarters in which they would literally feel themselves inside the cradle she rocks, lulled to sleep by the swaying motion of the boat. La Berceuse, coupled with van Gogh’s “aim to make art that offers consolation for the

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brokenhearted, reveals an artist engaged in a cathartic process of creating an art that heals. Considering that van Gogh painted five versions of *La Berceuse* during a time when he needed to be soothed, this image must have offered him great comfort after Gauguin had deserted him.

\[\text{notes:}\]

The Yellow House in Arles was instrumental to the realization of van Gogh's Studio of the South. Not only did he intend it to function as a home to share with other artists, but the main room on the first floor was also a working studio. When van Gogh rented the four-room house in May 1888, he had the interior and exterior painted and set about furnishing it with necessities such as beds, tables, and chairs. After buying a mattress, he slept in the Yellow House for the first time on September 16, 1888, and painted it in various media shortly thereafter. Located in the north of town, on the corner at Place Lamartine, the Yellow House faced the public park, the subject of van Gogh's *The Poet's Garden* (slide 2) and Gauguin's *The Arlésiennes (Mistral)* (slide 5).

Van Gogh's portrait of his new home, which he envisioned as the site of the Studio of the South, reveals a cobalt blue sky that envelops a series of yellow buildings accented with touches of green and pink. However, instead of only focusing on the yellow house with its prominent green shutters, that played such an important role during his time in Arles, van Gogh chose to include his home-studio and its immediate surroundings.

The house on the left is pink with green shutters, I mean the one in the shadow of the tree. That is the restaurant where I go for dinner every day. My friend the postman [Madame Roulin's (slide 4) husband] lives at the end of the street on the left, between the two railroad bridges. The café I painted is not in the picture, it is to the left of the restaurant."
Capturing a glimpse of daily life in Arles, van Gogh depicted people seated outdoors at the café just behind the Yellow House while others walk in the street and along the adjacent sidewalk. In the background van Gogh included two railroad tracks and a smoke-belching train, a marked sign of Arles's increasing modernity. Furthermore, the railroad's symbolic inclusion may also portray van Gogh's hopeful anticipation of Gauguin's imminent arrival from the north.

After van Gogh's departure from Arles, the Yellow House and the adjacent grocery shop became a café-bar. Years later, during World War II, the house was damaged by Allied bombing and subsequently demolished.
In anticipation of Gauguin's arrival at the Studio of the South, van Gogh planned to decorate the studio in the Yellow House (postcard A) with up to 12 paintings of sunflowers "...in which the raw or broken chrome yellows will blaze forth on various backgrounds.... [creating] effects like those of stained-glass windows in a Gothic church."\(^9\) Initially van Gogh's sunflower still lifes consisted of just a few blooms; but soon, three blooms turned to six, eventually going as high as the fifteen flowers he depicted in this painting.

In August 1888, van Gogh painted sunflowers against light blue-green backgrounds. In January 1889, he moved toward a more monochromatic treatment, placing the sunflowers in a yellow vase on a yellow table against a yellow background. Van Gogh envisioned these sunflowers as "torches or candelabra" flanking the image of Madame Roulin (slide 4). What started out as his investigation into the qualities of color and form evolved into images holding personal and universal symbolic value.

Sunflowers—tournesol in French, meaning "turning toward the sun"—have long been associated with divine love as well as friendship. Given that van Gogh painted this still life in the weeks following Gauguin's departure, the painting may be symbolic of their artistic fellowship. Crowded into a small vase, the sunflowers vary from tall, towering stems at the top of the canvas

to wilting, downcast blooms at the base of the arrangement. The large, yellow-rayed flowers are in various stages of blossoming; some have all of their petals intact, others have just a few remaining, while several have already lost their blossoms and consist solely of flower centers with brown, edible seeds. In the morning, once van Gogh placed the tall, coarse stems in a vase, he raced to complete his sunflower paintings since the cut flowers tend to fade and wilt rapidly. However, even though van Gogh painted with great speed, he devised a specific type of brushstroke for each element in the composition. The light yellow background consists of a basket-weave pattern; the petals and leaves are primarily individual marks of paint; and the centers of the flowers feature short, thick radiating strokes. The bright, vibrant yellow of the sunflower was the color van Gogh associated with the south (postcard A).
Paul Gauguin

Gauguin created 17 paintings during his nine-week stay in Arles. Several echo van Gogh’s artwork in terms of their subject matter, yet the artists’ styles differ dramatically. Gauguin’s *The Arlésiennes (Mistral)* features the same setting (the public park in *Place Lamartine*) as van Gogh’s *The Poet’s Garden* (slide 2). *The Arlésiennes (Mistral)* is also a direct response to van Gogh’s *Memory of the Garden at Etten (Ladies of Arles)* (The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg; www.hermitagemuseum.org) and exemplifies Gauguin’s preference for painting from the imagination. Gauguin specifically created *The Arlésiennes (Mistral)* to instruct his companion in the Studio of the South, who preferred to paint directly from nature.

When he first saw the local women of Arles (*Arlésiennes*) Gauguin remarked on how “their Grecian beauty and their shawls with pleats like you see in the early primitives remind one of Greek procesional friezes.” In this painting, he depicts four *Arlésiennes*, wrapped in traditional dark shawls, hurrying through Place Lamartine’s gardens. The two women with downcast eyes in the foreground shield their faces from the violent winds of the *mistral*. Not far behind, the stiff forms of two other *Arlésiennes* walk along the path—their figures seem to echo the stationary yellow cones of packed hay used to protect plants from cold, windy weather. These elements of the painting resulted from observations that Gauguin had made from his bedroom window but painted from memory. Instead of picturing the scene with realistic detail or accurate perspective, Gauguin simplified the winding path,

\[\text{Salvesen et al., 26.}\]
green bench, "weeping" tree, fountain, pond, and yellow cones into large, geometric shapes of flat color. Combined with his arbitrary handling of space, this approach succeeds in creating an enigmatic image. While van Gogh painted directly from nature, Gauguin wanted to paint from memory to use the power of the imagination to evoke mystery. Here Gauguin chose to observe the women and setting carefully, but then depicted them not as they appeared but creatively reinterpreted.

In contrast to the open foreground of van Gogh's The Poet's Garden, Gauguin blocked the entrance to the garden with the large bush and bright red fence, creating a distinct barrier between the observer and the scene. The somber and elusive expressions of the women impede a narrative reading of the work. Instead we focus on the abstract elements: the simplification of figures and nature into broad shapes and colors, the minimal detail, and the flat treatment of space, all of which remove the work from a specific time and place. Caught up in the decorative and rhythmic patterns of line, shape, and color within the painting, the viewer can readily understand the differences between Gauguin's The Arlésiennes (Mistral) and van Gogh's The Poet's Garden.
n March 1891, three years after leaving van Gogh and the Yellow House, Gauguin secured funding from the French government’s Ministry of Public Education and Fine Arts “to go to Tahiti to study and ultimately paint this country’s costumes and landscape.” Gauguin’s interest in exotic locales was longstanding; in 1886 he made his first journey to Brittany in the north of France and in 1887 to the island of Martinique, a French colony in the Caribbean, with a similar purpose in mind. These quests were motivated by and fed into the “primitive” persona he cultivated; after his 1887 expedition he wrote to his wife Mette: “You must remember that I have a dual nature, [that of] the Indian and [that of] the sensitive civilized man.” Gauguin’s justification for claiming this heritage stemmed from his having spent the first few years of his life in Peru, where his mother had relatives.

The Big Tree, painted during Gauguin’s first sojourn to Tahiti (from 1891 to 1893) fulfills the artist’s aim of capturing the local flora and fauna. At the same time, it demonstrates Gauguin’s artistic goal, to make the “primitive” or natural, the foundation of his art. Gauguin had devised a particular working method once he established himself in a new location. He later wrote: “In each locale I need a period of incubation, to learn each time the particular character of the plants, the trees—of the whole landscape.” He characterized his initial studies, both drawn and painted, as “documents,” which, he wrote to a friend, “will serve me for a long time, I hope, in France.”

Salvesen et al., 34.
Salvesen et al., 22.
Salvesen et al., 35.
Painted in October or November 1891, The Big Tree depicts a genre scene of a local family engaged in its daily activities. From left to right, a father stoops to husk a coconut, a seated woman cares for a child, and the family dog curls up to sleep; in the background another woman tends to animals. Additional local details include the thatched huts in the distance and the red-, blue-, and yellow-patterned clothing worn by the adults. Stemming from one of Gauguin's "documents" that captured the native inhabitants at work, this painting reveals a seemingly objective view of everyday life in Tahiti. Fulfilling his mission to "paint [Tahiti's] costumes and landscape," Gauguin chose not to focus on the individuals' facial features but instead to depict Tahitian life at a glance. As if he were a documentary reporter, the local inhabitants are seemingly completely unaware of Gauguin's presence.

In addition to signing the painting, Gauguin included its Tahitian title "Te ra'au rahiti," which translates as "the making of big Tahitian medicine." This implies that the painting's lush vegetation is more than a picturesque backdrop for this peaceful scene. During his numerous observations of the inhabitants at work, Gauguin recorded the Tahitian practice of using "the nuts and leaves of the autura tree and the pods and flowers of the hotu tree for medicinal purposes."25 The Big Tree features a faithful rendering of identifiable native vegetation—from left to right are a hotu tree, a mango tree (tunumaia), tropical almond tree (auteraa), and hibiscus shrubs. Uru paea leaves appear in the foreground. In recording the harmonious relationship between the people and their land, Gauguin revealed his interest in learning as much as he could about Tahiti, its resources, and its people.

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25 Salvesen et al, 36.
Gauguin and van Gogh both believed that artistic creativity was best nurtured in remote, unspoiled sites. Gauguin sought such an environment in Tahiti but found the island in the throes of colonial expansion. After Europeans first encountered Tahiti in the early 1600s, exploitation of its coconut, cotton, coffee, and sugarcane plantations began. In the 19th century, missionaries spread European culture and religion to this Pacific paradise. When Gauguin arrived in the French colony in 1891, he encountered a land in which the indigenous culture exhibited a distinct European influence.

This portrait depicts Tehamana, a young Tahitian woman who became Gauguin’s companion. When Gauguin first met Tehamana, he was so enchanted by her beauty that he asked her to marry him. Henceforth Tehamana became an important source of inspiration for him. Her name means “giver of strength”; for Gauguin she represented a very happy and artistically prolific period in his life.

In *Ancestors of Tehamana*, Gauguin created a visual and somewhat conceptual record of a Tahitian past. Since Gauguin was unaware of any primary evidence, he constructed Tehamana’s links to the past from books and non-Western sources. In the painting, these ancestral references are divided into three different horizontal sections behind Tehamana. In the top section,
indecipherable yellow **glyphs** inspired by **Easter Island** tablets provide a sense of Polynesian ancient history. The middle section contains figures from Polynesian mythology. In particular, the full-length figure of the moon goddess **Hina** represents the belief that all Tahitians descended from her union with the god **Taaroa**. As he did for the glyphs, Gauguin borrowed imagery from another culture by looking to Hindu sculpture for Hina’s appearance. The bottom section contains two ripe, red mangoes to symbolize the fertility and abundance of the Tahitian land. Combined, these three registers allude to the intellectual, spiritual, and physical realms of Tehamana’s past.

Tehamana sits prominently in front of this visual compendium of Tahitian culture and myth. To reinforce her link to her symbolic ancestry she holds a plaited fan (an emblem of beauty) that points directly toward the goddess Hina. Lest there be any doubt, Hina appears to physically “touch” Tehamana and they both wear red flowers in their hair. However, Tehamana is very much part of the French colonial present as she wears her high-collared “Mother Hubbard” dress—the type of clothing imposed by European missionaries to ensure a sense of modesty.

*slides and postcards*

Paul Gauguin
In 1888, as the two artists corresponded about the possibility of Gauguin moving to Arles to take part in the Studio of the South, van Gogh proposed that they exchange self-portraits. Gauguin’s offering was *Self-Portrait (Les Misérables)*; he provided the following explanation of it to van Gogh:

It is the face of an outlaw, ill-clad and powerful, like Jean Valjean [protagonist of Victor Hugo’s 1862 novel, *Les Misérables*]—with an inner nobility and gentleness. The face is flushed, the eyes accented by the surrounding colors of a furnace-fire. This is to represent the volcanic flames that animate the soul of the artist. The line of the eyes and nose, reminiscent of the flowers in a Persian carpet, epitomize the idea of an abstract symbolic style. The girlish background, with its childlike flowers, is there to attest to our artistic purity. As for this Jean Valjean, whom society has oppressed, cast out—for his love and vigor—is he not equally a symbol of the contemporary Impressionist painter?*

Through this statement Gauguin amplified in words what he set forth visually on canvas: an image of the artist as misunderstood outlaw, who presents a roguish exterior but harbors an inner spirit that is both fiery and pure.

In this self-portrait, Gauguin includes a small profile portrait of the painter Émile Bernard (1868–1941). Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Bernard corresponded frequently and exchanged self-portraits in the spirit of their shared artistic philosophies. Prior to his sojourn to the south, Gauguin and Bernard had

*Salvesen et al, 25.*
painted together in Brittany. Therefore, Gauguin's inclusion of Bernard in his own self-portrait reinforces his commitment to an artistic brotherhood.

Along with portraying his role as an artist in late-19th-century society, Gauguin's self-portrait expressed his ideas about painting. In keeping with his assertion that lines "epitomize the idea of an abstract symbolic style," he simplified and accentuated the contours of his face and body, emphasizing their flowing movement. The background is painted orange-gold, a "color removed from nature." By situating himself outside of time and place, Gauguin embodies his philosophies about art, thus exchanging with van Gogh artistic beliefs as well as likenesses.

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In July 1895 Gauguin left France for Tahiti. Although frequently troubled by illness, monetary difficulties, and depression, he spent these final eight years of his life productively, completing more than 100 paintings and 400 woodcuts as well as writing three books. In 1900 he entered into a contract with Ambroise Vollard (1868–1939), a Paris art dealer who also collected the works of Gauguin’s fellow Post-Impressionist Paul Cézanne (1839–1906). It was reportedly at Vollard’s request that Gauguin, in 1901, painted a series, including this one, of four sunflower paintings, a subject van Gogh had painted years before. The art dealer subsequently included Gauguin’s series in a 1903 exhibition.

Gauguin did not regard himself as a still-life painter and communicated as much to Vollard in a letter from early 1900:

...I am not a painter who copies nature—today less than before. With me everything happens in my crazy imagination and when I tire of painting figures (my preference) I begin a still life and finish it without any model. Besides this is not really the land of flowers.  

Despite that assertion, Gauguin had written in autumn 1898 to the Parisian painter and engraver Georges de Monfreid (1856–1929) asking for sunflower seeds, the bountiful harvest of which we see in this picture.

Gauguin altered the conventional format of a tabletop still life by placing his sunflowers in a Tahitian basket on a chair. This arrangement permitted the

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artist to play off the curving contours of basket and chair seat. A white cloth placed on the chair back silhouettes the golden sunflowers. Gauguin also introduced two unusual elements into his composition: a centrally located “eye-flower” emerging from the darkened background and a Polynesian woman framed by the window at right. Both add an element of mystery that illustrates the power of Gauguin’s imagination.
1. Imagine that you have to describe Vincent van Gogh so that a friend can easily recognize him. Study the portrait (slide 1). What words will you use to describe his features? His expression? His clothing? Next, compare van Gogh’s self-portrait to Gauguin’s self-portrait (postcard C). How are they similar? How are they different? What impression does each artist seem to want to convey about himself? If you didn’t know that these were self-portraits, could you determine that these men were artists? Why or why not?

2. During his two-year stay in Paris, van Gogh created approximately 24 self-portraits. Gain a better understanding of the process of making a portrait of oneself by creating your own self-portrait. Pose for a bust-length (head and shoulders) self-portrait in front of a mirror. Which expression do you assume? Why? Explain how your choice of expression makes posing for your self-portrait more or less challenging. What does your self-portrait convey about your personality, interests, and demeanor?

3. Van Gogh juxtaposed the **complementary colors** red and green throughout this self-portrait. Select two other complementary colors (yellow and purple or blue and orange). Recreate van Gogh’s self-portrait in the **Pointillist** style using another pair of complementary colors. Substitute yellow (or blue) wherever van Gogh used red, and purple (or orange) wherever van Gogh used green. How does your experimentation with other complementary color pairs affect the overall image? **Note to teacher:** So that students focus on the complementary colors rather than worrying about replicating van Gogh’s face, distribute the template (page 49) of the Self-Portrait.

4. Access www.vangogh museum.nl or books about Vincent van Gogh (see Bibliography and Additional Resources) for a visual overview of van Gogh’s self-portraits. Select three of van Gogh’s self-portraits and take on the role of van Gogh writing a letter to his brother Theo about the paintings. Be sure to include vivid descriptions of the images, your rationale for creating them, and what you hope they convey about you as a person and artist.
1. Van Gogh and Gauguin both painted views of Place Lamartine—the public park seen from the windows of the Yellow House in Arles. Compare van Gogh’s *The Poet’s Garden* to Gauguin’s *The Arlésiennes (Mistral)* (slide 5). What is similar? Is there any evidence that reveals that these are paintings of the same garden? How do the images differ?

2. Van Gogh created *The Poet’s Garden* as part of a larger series with the same theme for the decoration of Gauguin’s bedroom. Imagine yourself as Gauguin and look closely at the colors, textures, and subject of *The Poet’s Garden*. What message/impression might van Gogh have been trying to convey to you?

3. Van Gogh read constantly; the title, *The Poet’s Garden*, reflects his interest in the **Italian Renaissance** literary figures Petrarch and Boccaccio. Research the relationship between these two 14th-century authors. How might it have compared to the relationship van Gogh desired to strike with Gauguin?

4. This painting depicts a public park in Arles. Compare and contrast this scene to a public park in your community. If van Gogh had included people, what might they have been doing? How would their activities compare to those that take place in your community park?
1. List and describe the contents of van Gogh's bedroom. Compare them to the contents of your own bedroom. What does van Gogh's bedroom reveal about its occupant? What does your bedroom convey about you? What object(s) are fundamental to a simple bedroom? How would you update van Gogh's bedroom by modernizing it for the 21st century? Distribute the template of *The Bedroom* (page 50) and draw objects to furnish it for the 21st century.

2. By depicting a space in the Yellow House that was personal and intimate to him, van Gogh essentially created a portrait of himself. Compare this "self-portrait" to his 1886 *Self-Portrait* (slide 1). Based on both images, write a character sketch of Vincent van Gogh. *Variation:* Based on both images, write a monologue for Vincent van Gogh describing life in the Yellow House.

3. Van Gogh, searching for a house to rent in Arles, found the Yellow House. Imagine that he had to rent this bedroom to a boarder in order to supplement his income. Write a "Room for Rent" advertisement for the *Chicago Tribune*. To attract potential renters, be sure to include the room's most appealing features and contents.
1. Van Gogh felt that this image of Madame Roulin rocking a cradle was as soothing as a lullaby. Lullabies such as “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” and “Rock A-Bye Baby” have long been sung to comfort infants. Read the lyrics of traditional lullabies. Then, using La Berceuse as a starting point, write a lullaby inspired by van Gogh’s painting.

2. Van Gogh felt that this painting was soothing and consoling. Divide the class in half to debate the aptness of such a statement based on students’ opinions of this painting.

3. Madame Roulin assumes the maternal role of “La Berceuse” (slide 4) in this painting. Compare Madame Roulin to other images of mothers in art (examples at the Art Institute include: Correggio’s Virgin and Child with St. John the Baptist, c.1515; Rubens’s The Holy Family with Saints Elizabeth and John the Baptist, c.1615; the Luluwa Maternity Figure, mid–to late 19th century; Mary Cassatt’s The Child’s Bath, 1893; and Pablo Picasso’s Mother and Child, 1921). Explain how van Gogh and the other artists focused on specific maternal qualities. How are these images similar? Different?

4. Van Gogh’s interest in complementary colors is evident in La Berceuse. Compare his use of complementary colors in La Berceuse, Self-Portrait (slide 1), and The Bedroom (slide 3). What different effects do these colors create?
1. In *The Yellow House*, van Gogh depicted a setting that figured prominently throughout his daily life in Arles. Prior to painting this image, van Gogh sketched a similar scene and sent it to his brother Theo along with a letter describing the house and its surroundings. Recreate van Gogh’s letter to Theo using this painting as a point of departure. Be sure to include references to the house, adjacent buildings, streets, sidewalks, trees, sky, and the railroad. If you wish, include references to the “neighbors” van Gogh depicts in the painting by giving them identities. *Note to teacher:* You may wish to share excerpts from van Gogh’s letters (see *Bibliography and Additional Resources*) with students.

2. Create a painting or drawing of your home and its surroundings in the style of Vincent van Gogh. What vibrant colors will you use? What textures will you emphasize and exaggerate?

3. Access [www.vangoghmuseum.nl](http://www.vangoghmuseum.nl) for a virtual tour of *The Yellow House*. Based on the Web site’s virtual tour and van Gogh’s painting, write a “For Rent” advertisement for the Yellow House. *Variation:* Write an advertisement for the house as if it were a vacation hotel. Write a letter to the French government telling them how and why the house should be rebuilt as a memorial to van Gogh and Gauguin.
1. Three years after van Gogh painted *Sunflowers*, Gauguin painted his still life, *Sunflowers on an Armchair* (postcard D). Compare and contrast both artists' approaches to painting sunflowers. How are they similar? How are they different? Based on your observations, do you think Gauguin was influenced by van Gogh's manner of painting sunflowers? Explain.

2. *Sunflowers* is essentially a **monochromatic** painting. Select a fruit, flower, or another appropriate still-life object, take its dominant color, and create your own monochromatic work of art. Discuss the effect of creating a subject and setting in varied tones of the same color. Does your monochromatic artwork convey a particular mood due to the dominance of one color? Next, recreate your work of art by selecting a different color for your still life’s surrounding setting, props, etc. Compare both works of art. Is the mood different? Which work of art do you find more effective? Why?

3. The sunflower plant belongs to the genus *Helianthus* and the family *Asteraceae*. Research information about the plant, including its many uses. Why do sunflowers bend their heads? Why is it called a “composite” flower? Research where sunflowers grow and the climate best suited for them. What season do they bloom? Are there different varieties? Are their seeds edible?

4. Van Gogh associated the sunflower and the color yellow with his friendship with Gauguin and their time together in Arles. What associations do you have with colors (blue, white, red, black, green, etc.)? Use specific colors to create an emblem that is meaningful and symbolic of a time in your life.
1. Two of the women in this painting use their shawls as protection from the mistral—a violent wind that often sweeps through Arles. Research the mistral and its effects on this region of France. What weather systems are particular to your region? What effect do they have on the dwellings, habits, and activities of local people?

2. Gauguin intentionally simplified many elements of this scene by ignoring realistic detail and perspective. Simulate this process by creating a scene in which objects are simplified. What effect does this have? Variation: Using paint or color pencils, recreate The Arlésiennes (Mistral) by making it look as realistic as possible. Recreate van Gogh’s painting of the same park (The Poet’s Garden) in Gauguin’s simplified, decorative style.

3. Many feel this painting is mysterious and enigmatic. Write a short mystery story from the point of view of someone in the painting or from the perspective of a third-person narrator. Share your stories in class and discuss which elements of the painting had the greatest impact on your plot. Was there one particular element (e.g. bush in foreground, yellow cones, etc.) that played a large role in everyone’s mystery story?
1. Gauguin portrayed Tahiti’s local vegetation in this painting. Before beginning the painting he made numerous studies of the plants and trees. Simulate his process by sketching the plants and trees around your school and in your neighborhood. Next, label them according to their scientific names by accessing the Chicago Botanic Garden’s Web site plant index at http://bestplants.chicago-botanic.org/plntindx.htm. As a culminating activity, display the sketches in a classroom exhibit of local vegetation and incorporate images of local plants, trees, and flowers into a classroom mural.

2. Compare this painting to Gauguin’s *The Arlésiennes (Mistral)* (slide 5). Discuss the overall effect of Gauguin’s use of observation in this painting versus more reliance on his imagination.

3. Use *The Big Tree* as the signature image for a travel advertisement to Tahiti. What aspects of this painting will you highlight in your advertisement? Variation: Write an additional advertisement for a trip to Arles using *The Arlésiennes* (slide 5) or van Gogh’s *The Poet’s Garden* (slide 2). Which advertisement is most effective? Why?
1. Gauguin painted images of local women in many places he lived. Compare his impressions of the *Arlésiennes* (slide 5) and native Tahitians (slide 6) with this painting of Tehamana. What does he seem to try to convey?

2. The yellow *glyphs* at the top of the painting represent an ancient, and never-translated, writing from Easter Island (located 2,200 miles west of Chile in the Pacific Ocean). Imagine that you are able to decipher it. Based on the painting's imagery, what might it say? Compare your "deciphered" text to the text of your classmates.

3. Compare the figures in this painting. How is Tehamana (in the foreground) similar to the goddess Hina (in the background). How are they different? What do you think Gauguin was trying to convey by linking these two women? Explore other examples of people being linked and/or compared to ancestors, heroes, or great sports figures (e.g. Mayor Richard J. Daley and Mayor Richard M. Daley; Tiger Woods and Jack Nicklaus; Princess Diana and Mother Theresa, etc.) How are they linked? What impact does this linkage have on how we perceive the younger figure in Gauguin's painting?
1. Choose the hero/heroine of a book that you like, and make a self-portrait of yourself as that character. For example, if you choose Harry Potter, don’t forget to add Harry’s glasses and distinguishing scar to your own features. Next, write a short story with yourself as the main character in this role.

2. Using paints, markers, or colored pencils, create a self-portrait that includes one key facet of your life (for example: your room, a favorite hobby or place, a special person in your life). Write a short essay explaining what you painted and why it is meaningful.
1. Write a short story to accompany Gauguin's painting. Be sure to include sensory details, such as what you can see, smell, hear, touch, etc. Use descriptive adjectives and adverbs to enliven your essay. *Variation:* Imagine that you are the Tahitian woman visible in the window of Gauguin's *Sunflowers on an Armchair.* Write an account describing who you are and how you became part of the painting.

2. Why do you think both Gauguin and van Gogh (postcard B) chose to paint sunflowers? What do you think the sunflower symbolized for van Gogh (see postcard B) after the time in Arles and Gauguin while in Tahiti?
Classroom Suggestions for all Four Postcards

Divide the class into four groups. Distribute one postcard to each group. Assign each group two to three minutes to collectively list as many descriptive words and phrases as possible to describe each painting. Once the time is up, rotate the postcards and begin again. At the end of this activity, each group should have four lists of descriptive words and phrases. Through a class discussion, compile the lists on the chalkboard. Next, using the students’ collective words and phrases as points of departure, have students create original poems or prose inspired by any or all of the four paintings. Once students have fine-tuned their poetry or prose, have an in-class poetry/prose reading.

Culminating Classroom Activity

Create a “Studio of the South” in Your Classroom

Van Gogh and Gauguin’s nine-week sojourn in the Studio of the South offered them an opportunity to share artistic philosophies and painting techniques. They often approached the same subject matter with dramatically different intentions. Sometimes, the artists experimented with one another’s favored approaches to painting. For example, on several occasions, van Gogh approached a blank canvas using Gauguin’s preferred method of painting from the imagination. Likewise, Gauguin attempted to use one of van Gogh’s methods of painting directly from nature without using preparatory sketches.

Look carefully at all of the slides and postcards in this teacher packet. Describe van Gogh’s style. Describe Gauguin’s style. Compare and contrast their styles. Note how the artists use complementary colors and brushstrokes in their paintings. Select one painting by van Gogh or Gauguin. Recreate it in the other artist’s style. What specific elements did you have to change?

Next, to gain a better understanding of each artist’s technique, style, and the influence van Gogh and Gauguin had on one another, create three distinctly
separate works of art. First, select a scene, object, or person in your classroom to paint or draw. Then create three different paintings or drawings of your selected subject matter by following these specifications:

**First painting/drawing:** Make preparatory sketches of your subject. Select one sketch and use it as the basis for your finished painting/drawing.

**Second painting/drawing:** Make preparatory sketches of your subject. Remove the subject from your view. Create a finished painting/drawing from your memory. Incorporate elements from your preparatory sketches into your memory painting/drawing.

**Third painting/drawing:** Select a pair of complementary colors (red and green; blue and orange; yellow and purple). Create a painting/drawing of your subject using your selected pair of complementary colors as the main color scheme throughout.

**Finally,** convert your classroom into a Studio of the South by exhibiting the artworks as a *décoration* (a series of separate paintings).
atelier: Artist’s or designer’s studio or workroom, a workshop.

citron: Citrus fruit resembling a lemon but larger with little pulp and a very thick rind.

complementary colors: Colors that have the maximum contrast to one another. They are opposite each other on the color wheel: a circular diagram divided into six triangles, each designated as one of the three primary colors (red, blue, yellow) and three secondary colors (green, purple, orange). The complement of one primary color is formed by mixing the remaining two primary colors (green is the complementary of red).

contour: Outline of a form.

décor: Series of separate paintings, brought together on a wall or in the same room, that forms a unified whole; large, mural-size works painted for a specific setting.

Easter Island: Famous for its giant stone statues, this island stands in isolation 2,200 miles west of Chile. The first European visitors, the Dutch, named the island “Easter Island” in memory of their own day of arrival in 1722.

genre: Scene of everyday life.

glyph: Usually pictorial in origin, an emblem used like writing. Glyphs were used in Mesoamerica since Olmec times; also a unit of Maya writing. Ancient Egyptians also used a pictorial form of writing, hieroglyphs.

The Hague: Artists of The Hague School worked in Holland from around 1860 to 1900. They turned away from academic themes based on history and mythology and depicted realistic settings of their surroundings. They were sensitive to the effects of light and atmosphere, recalling 17th-century Dutch landscape painting.

impasto: Visibly thick application of paint, having the consistency of paste.

Impressionism: Art movement originating in France during the latter part of the 19th century through which artists sought to capture subjects of the contemporary world with pure, unmixed color and loose brushstrokes signifying an immediate response to nature. The Impressionists came together initially as an exhibiting group known as the Independents and received the nickname by which they are known after a critic designated a painting by Claude Monet (1840–1926) as merely an “impression” rather than a finished work.

Italian Renaissance: Period of cultural rebirth lasting from approximately the 15th century to the mid–16th century in the arts and from the 14th century in literature. Originally centered in Italy, primarily Florence and Rome, the humanist ideas of this movement spread throughout Europe during the 16th century. Advances in the visual arts included the development of perspective and an emphasis on rendering solid figures in spaces that appear to be three-dimensional.

mistral: A strong, cold wind from the northern region of Europe that sweeps through southern France, most frequently in winter, and blows continuously for several days at a time.

monochrome: Term designating a picture made in a single color or different tones (shades) or values (relative lightness or darkness) of one color.

Neo-Impressionism: Art term referring to the works of Georges Seurat (1859–1891) and his circle, primarily Pissarro (1830–1903) and Paul Signac (1863–1935), based upon the principle of achieving color harmony through the optical mixing of complementary colors; these painters are sometimes referred to as Pointillists.

perspective: Scientific method used by artists since the Italian Renaissance to create the illusion of three-dimensional objects and space on two-dimensional surfaces, so that they seem to appear as in nature.
**Pointillism:** Method of painting characterized by the application of small, regular brushstrokes of pure pigment. Pioneered by Georges Seurat (1859–1891), this style was based on the theory that brighter, more vivid hues would result from the optical blending of the colors.

**Post-Impressionism:** Term coined in 1911 by an English critic to describe various trends in painting, particularly in France, that developed from Impressionism. Literally “after Impressionism,” the artists of this generation pushed beyond their predecessors’s emphasis on the appearance of nature, stressing instead a more prolonged and personal vision.

**primitive:** Term associated with the earliest stages of civilization. To Gauguin, “primitive” evoked a more direct, pure, and simple way of life and form of expression. He went to Tahiti in search of this quality.

**still life:** Painting or photograph that represents inanimate objects.

**triptych:** A European religious altarpiece, popular in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, consisting of three panels; the two outside panels, often hinged, may close to cover the central panel.

**woodcut:** Print made on paper from the inked, raised surface of a wooden block that has been cut away with a knife; the raised portions thereby form the design on the sheet.
Alyscamps: AHL-ees-kahmp

Arles: ahl

Arlésiennes: ahr-LAY-zee-ehn

Asteraceae: as-TEHR-ah-keye

Auvers: oh-VEHR

Avignon: ah-VEE-nyohn

Émile Bernard: a-MEEL bear-NAHR

Giovanni Boccaccio: gee-oh-VAHN-nee bo-CAH-chee-oh

Georges Braque: jorge BRAHK

Paul Cézanne: pohl say-ZAHN

Fernand Cormon: fahr-NAHND kohr-MOHN

Gustave Courbet: goos-TAV koor-BAY

crépons: CRAY-pohn

Georges de Monfreid: jorge duh MOHN-freed

Eugène Delacroix: YU-jeen DEH-la-kwah

Albrecht Dürer: al-BREKT DOO-rer

Etten: EHT-tehn

franc: frahnk

Paul Gauguin: pohl goh-GAHN

The Hague: hayg

Helianthus: HEE-lee-an-thus

Hina: HEE-na

Hivaoa: HEE-vah-oh-a

Lyon: LEE-ohn

Marcelle: mahr-SELL

Marquesas: mahr-KAY-sas

Marseilles: mahr-SEYE

Martinique: mar-tee-NEEK

Henri Matisse: ohn-REE mah-TEES

Anton Mauve: ahn-TOHN mawv

Mette Gad: met gad

Les Misérables: lay mee-zahr-AHB

Claude Monet: klohd moh-NAH

Musée d’Orsay: mu-ZAY dor-SAY

Augustine-Alix Pellicot: aw-gus-TEEN ah-leeks peh-lee-KO

Francesco Petrarch: fran-CHES-ko peh-TRARK

Pablo Picasso: PAH-blo pee-KAH-so

Camille Pissarro: ka-MEEL pee-SAHI-roh

Place Lamartine: plass la-mahr-TEEN

Provençal: pro-vahn-SAL
Rhône: rohn

Madame Roulin (La Berceuse): mah-DAHM roo-LEHN
(la bur-SO0Z)

Saint-Rémy: sahnt RAY-mee

Sainte Trophime: sahnt tro-PHEEM

Georges Seurat: jorge suh-RAH

Paul Signac: pohl SEEN-yah

Taaroa: tah-ah-RO-ah

Te ra’au rahi: tay rah-AH-oo RAH-hee

Tehamana (Merahi Metua No Tehamana): tay-hah-MAH-nah may-RAH-hee mah-TOO-ah no tay-hah-MAH-nah

tournesol: tohr-NEH-sohl

Jean Valjean: jun val-JUN

Rembrandt van Rijn: rem-BRANT vahn REEN

Vincent van Gogh: VIN-sent van GOH

Ambroise Vollard: ahm-BROZ voh-LAHRD
BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BOOKS


*The Helen Birch Bartlett Collection, The Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 12, no. 2 (1986).


BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS


WEB SITES

The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

**www.hermitagemuseum.org**

This site allows you to extensively search the collection of digital images (which includes works by van Gogh and Gauguin) by type, artist, or country.

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

**www.vangoghmuseum.nl**

This easily accessible site provides an extensive look at the life and art of Vincent van Gogh in timeline form and through a 3-D virtual tour, and enables the viewer to access images from the collection with related information.

Vincent van Gogh Teacher Program

**www.nga.gov/education/vgtSplash.htm**

This online teacher program from the National Gallery of Art provides images with related information; activities in fine art, language art, and social science; bibliography of resources; and a pronunciation guide with sound bites in various languages.

Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Studio of the South

**www.artic.edu/aic**

In the “Special Exhibition” section of the Art Institute’s Web site, view images and information related to this exhibition about two of the most famous modern artists.

VIDEOS


*In a Brilliant Light: Van Gogh in Arles*. Produced by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. 58 min. The Office of Film and Television, 1984.
VINCENT VAN GOGH

SLIDE 1
_Self Portrait_, 1886/1887
Oil on artist's board, mounted on panel;
16 in. x 12.7 in. (41 x 32.5 cm)
Joseph Winterbotham Collection, 1954.326

SLIDE 2
_The Poet’s Garden_, 1888
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Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Larned Coburn Memorial Collection, 1933.433

SLIDE 3
_The Bedroom_, 1889
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SLIDE 4
_Madame Roulin Rocking the Cradle (La Berceuse)_ , 1889
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Helen Birch Bartlett Memorial Collection, 1926.200

POSTCARD A
_The Yellow House_, 1888
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Vincent van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

POSTCARD B
_Sunflowers_, 1889
Oil on canvas; 31.11 in. x 28.52 in. (95 x 73 cm)
Vincent van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

PAUL GAUGUIN

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_The Arlésiennes (Mistral)_ , 1888
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_Ancestors of Tehamana (Merahi Metua No Tehamana)_ , 1893
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_Self-Portrait (Les Misérables)_ , 1888
Oil on canvas; 17.58 in. x 21.49 in. (45 x 55 cm)
Vincent van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

POSTCARD D
_Sunflowers on an Armchair_, 1901
Oil on canvas; 28.52 in. x 35.55 in. (73 x 91 cm)
The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg