



Social Studies Exemplary Text Student Handout

I have nature and art and poetry, if that is not enough what is?
—Letter to Theo, January 1874

On March 30, 1853, the handsome, soberly dressed Reverend Theodorus van Gogh entered the ancient town hall of Groot-Zundert, in the Brabant, a province of the Netherlands. He opened the birth register to number twenty-nine, where exactly one year earlier he had sadly written “Vincent Willem van Gogh, stillborn.” Beside the inscription he wrote again “Vincent Willem van Gogh,” the name of his new, healthy son, who was sleeping soundly next to his mother in the tiny parsonage across the square. The baby’s arrival was an answered prayer for the still-grieving family.

The first Vincent lay buried in a tiny grave by the door of the church where Pastor van Gogh preached. The Vincent who lived grew to be a sturdy redheaded boy. Every Sunday on his way to church, young Vincent would pass the headstone carved with the name he shared. Did he feel as if his dead brother were the rightful Vincent, the one who would remain perfect in his parents’ hearts, and that he was merely an unsatisfactory replacement? That might have been one of the reasons he spent so much of his life feeling like a lonely outsider, as if he didn’t fit anywhere in the world.

Despite his dramatic beginning, Vincent had an ordinary childhood, giving no hint of the painter he would become. The small parsonage, with an upstairs just two windows wide under a slanting roof, quickly grew crowded. By the time he was six he had two sisters, Anna and Elizabeth, and one brother, Theo, whose gentle nature made him their mother’s favorite.

Greenberg, J., and Jordan, S. (2001). *A Brabant Boy 1853–75. Vincent Van Gogh: Portrait of an Artist*. New York: Random House.

The Van Gogh Gallery. Retrieved from <http://www.vangoghgallery.com>

This is an example of exemplary text found in *Common Core Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: Appendix B Text Exemplars and Sample Performance Tasks*. Retrieved from http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_B.pdf

Social Studies Exemplary Text Teacher Resource

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Teacher introduces the text with minimal commentary and students read it independently. Teacher then reads passage aloud. Give a brief definition to words students would likely not be able to define from context (underlined in text). Teacher guides the students through a series of text-dependent questions. Complete the performance task as a cumulative evaluation of the close-reading.

Text-Dependent Questions

1. What is the significance of the title *Portrait of an Artist*? What are the possible meanings for the word *portrait*? What meanings can be applied to the title of this passage?
2. Why does the author begin with a quote from a letter that Van Gogh wrote to his brother? How do the words and the perspective in the letter connect with the text passage?
3. Do you agree with Van Gogh’s quote at the beginning of the passage on “nature, art, and poetry” and the worth of these things? If so, why? If not, how would you amend the quote to reflect your own desires for your life?
4. Who was the first Vincent?
5. What happened to the first Vincent?
6. Who was the second Vincent?
7. Why does the author say he felt like he didn’t belong?
8. What did the second Vincent see every Sunday and why was that strange?

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EFL 4
Word Count 280

9. What is the tone of the text? What words and phrases does the author use to convey this tone?

Performance Tasks for Informational Texts

Write a paragraph essay about how the authors use tone and perspective to explain how Van Gogh's early life shaped his character. Analyze the validity of Vincent's characterization as a "lonely outsider" and how this is connected to the tone of the passage. Cite evidence from the text. [RI.7.4]

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