

*Following is some general information on Vincent Van Gogh
(1853-1890)*

Vincent Van Gogh is known mostly for two things: his color saturated paintings and the fact that he committed suicide at age 37.

Van Gogh began to study art after an erratic education and an attempt at evangelizing. His early paintings are dark and somber, the most famous being "The Potato Eaters" (1885). The next year he joined his brother, Theo, in Paris, where he continued his study of art. He also met many of the masters of the time, such as Pissaro, Monet, and Gauguin. Because of the influence of these Impressionists, Van Gogh began to use brighter colors and shorter brush strokes, and while his painting improved, his temperament suffered.

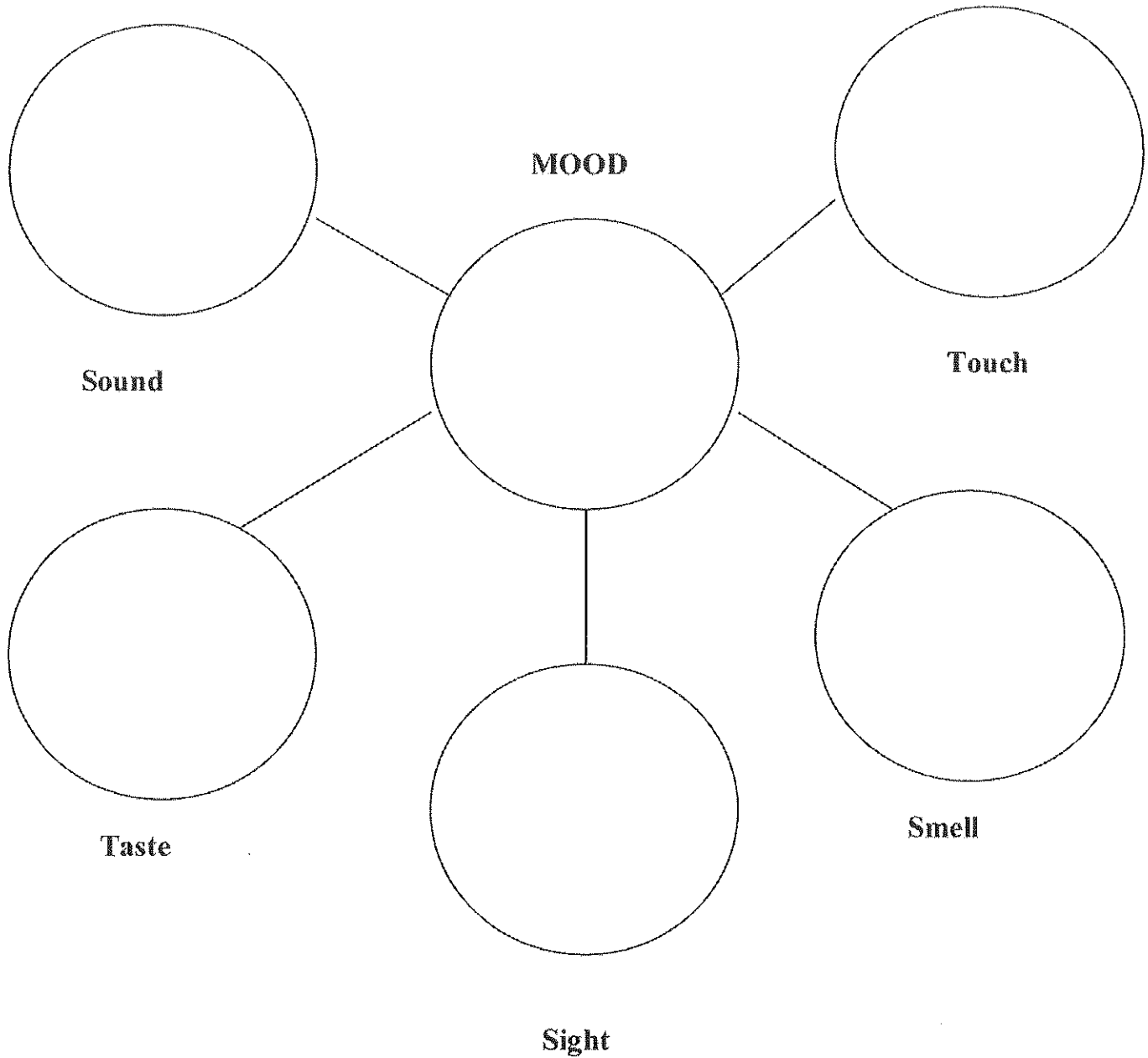
It was near the end of 1888 when Van Gogh's sanity began to falter. He suffered from epilepsy, psychosis, and delusions. A fit of epilepsy resulted in Van Gogh cutting a portion of his own ear lobe off as penance for chasing his friend Gauguin with a knife. As a result of bouts of madness, he committed himself to an asylum in France at the end of that year. Although his illness kept him from painting much, he managed to create *The Starry Night* while in the asylum at Saint-Rémy.

After his release in 1890, Van Gogh produced almost a painting per day. On July 27, 1890, Vincent Van Gogh shot himself in the chest, and died two days later.

Ironically, Van Gogh sold only one painting during his lifetime but has since become one of the most well-loved and well-known painters in history.

IV.

Using details in the painting, complete the chart below.



V.

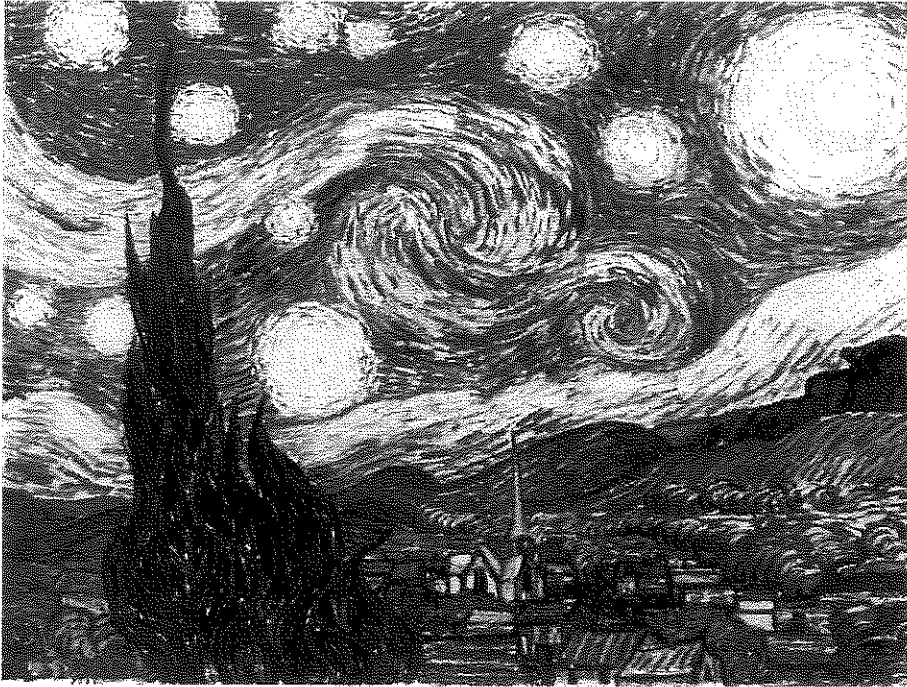
List one or two possible thematic ideas presented in the painting, *Starry Night*.

Choose one of those ideas and write a thematic statement. What does *The Starry Night* say about that thematic idea?

List three or more specific details that support this theme.

VI.

Which detail in the painting most effectively conveys the theme? Justify your answer.



The Starry Night

*That does not keep me from having a terrible need of —
shall I say the word — religion. Then I go out at night to paint the stars.*
—Vincent Van Gogh in a letter to his brother

The town does not exist
except where one black-haired tree slips
up like a drowned woman into the hot sky.
The town is silent. The night boils with eleven stars.
Oh starry starry night! This is how
I want to die.

It moves. They are all alive.
Even the moon bulges in its orange irons
to push children, like a god, from its eye.
The old unseen serpent swallows up the stars.
Oh starry starry night! This is how
I want to die:

into that rushing beast of the night,
sucked up by that great dragon, to split
from my life with no flag,
no belly,
no cry.

—Anne Sexton

Vincent

By Don McLean

Starry, starry night,
Paint your palette blue and grey,
Look out on a summer's day,
With eyes that know the darkness in my soul,
Shadows on the hills,
Sketch the trees and the daffodils,
Catch the breeze and the winter chills,
In colors on the snowy linen land.

Now I understand what you tried to say to me,
How you suffered for your sanity,
How you tried to set them free.
They would not listen, they did not know how.
Perhaps they'll listen now.

Starry, starry night,
Flaming flowers that brightly blaze,
Swirling clouds in violet haze,
Reflect in Vincent's eyes of china blue,
Colors changing hue, morning field of amber grain,
Weathered faces lined in pain,
Are soothed beneath the artist's loving hand.

Now I understand what you tried to say to me,
How you suffered for your sanity,
How you tried to set them free.
They would not listen, they did not know how.
Perhaps they'll listen now.

For they could not love you,
But still your love was true.
And when no hope was left in sight
On that starry, starry night,
You took your life, as lovers often do.
But I could have told you, Vincent,
This world was never meant for one
As beautiful as you.

Starry, starry night,
Portraits hung in empty halls,
Frameless head on nameless walls,
With eyes that watch the world and can't forget.
Like the strangers that you've met,

The ragged men in the ragged clothes,
The silver thorn of bloody rose,
Lie crushed and broken on the virgin snow.

Now I think I know what you tried to say to me,
How you suffered for your sanity,
How you tried to set them free.
They would not listen, they're not listening still.
Perhaps they never will...

Directions: Read the Anne Sexton poem and the lyrics to Don McLean's "Vincent" dealing with Van Gogh and his painting. Create a new poem by choosing words and lines from the poems. Interject your own words, lengthen or shorten lines, use ellipses, etc., but make sure that your new work of art has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Your new poem should give a new perspective to Van Gogh's painting.

