

Vincent's story till he left Drenthe (task story teller)

Vincent grew up in Brabant (the Netherlands), in a large family. Vincent van Gogh was born on March 30, 1853 in the South of the Netherlands. He was not the first child of pastor Theodorus van Gogh and Anna Carbentus. Their first son (also a 'Vincent') was stillborn exactly one year earlier, on the same date.

Luckily everything went well with the second Vincent. Three more sisters and two brothers followed: Anna, Theo, Wil, Lies and Cor.

The Van Gogh family regularly went for walks in the South of The Netherlands. Those walks formed the basis of Vincent's love of nature. When Vincent was 11 he transferred from the village school to a boarding school. He hated it, but he did finish primary school there. Although he occasionally drew, his artistic aptitude was not yet very noticeable.

Via his uncle Cent, Vincent was able to work as an apprentice at the age of sixteen at an international art dealer.

September 1872 became the starting point of the lifelong correspondence with his younger brother Theo.

Vincent spent a long time searching for his destination in life. He tried a variety of jobs, from art dealer to schoolmaster and lay preacher and eventually found his calling with the help of his younger brother Theo.

In 1875 he was, while working for the art dealer, transferred to Paris and became increasingly involved in religion. Despite his interest in art, Vincent found work in the art trade less and less interesting. His employers at the art dealer were therefore less and less satisfied with him. In 1876 he was fired.

His parents were very worried: Vincent was already 24 and still had no clear destination in life. After a few months they agreed that he wanted to study theology. Vincent lacked the discipline to study. He preferred to wander around the city and take long walks. Vincent regularly made sketches in letters to his brother Theo. Sometimes he sent a drawing of what he had seen. This eventually led to an important turn in his life: Theo advised him to do more with drawing. Vincent became convinced that as an artist he could also serve God.

Vincent's parents were not happy with his choice to become an artist. Fortunately, that did not stop Vincent from working hard and improving his skills as a draftsman and painter.

His brother Theo was now manager at an art dealer in Paris. He made sure that Vincent could fully focus on being an artist by supporting him financially. Vincent's parents were very disappointed that their eldest son had chosen an artist's life. In their eyes that was the same as a social failure.

At the beginning of 1882, Vincent met Sien Hoornik. She became not only his model, but also his lover. Vincent's close circle and family (including painter Mauve) were shocked: Sien had been a prostitute. Moreover, she was pregnant and already had a five-year-old daughter. But Vincent felt sorry for Sien and was determined to take care of her. He rented a studio where

she, her newborn baby and daughter could also live. Theo did not agree with Vincent's choice, but continued to support him financially. Vincent stubbornly persisted, but in the end he realized that the relationship with Sien brought him less than he would like. He broke off the relationship.

After the split with Sien, Vincent left for the Drenthe countryside to draw and paint heathland and peat landscapes. He liked it there and went to work in good spirits. Yet the province not only brought him peace and inspiration:

'Drenthe is superb, but staying out depends on many things – depends on whether one has the money for it, depends on whether one can withstand the loneliness.'

Vincent to Theo, Nuenen, 6 December 1883

Rain, cold and loneliness meant that Vincent (30 years old) called it a day after less than three months in Drenthe.



Vincent van Gogh, Two Women in the Peat, 1883

Mission: I'm inviting you, time traveling youth leaders, to step into 1883, into the world of Vincent to discover details about five life events of Vincent by meeting those who were there. Each person you will meet has some relation with Vincent and a specific task that you need to complete as a group to get a part of Vincent's story. I'm challenging all groups to come up with a small activity that you could organize for Vincent that would benefit his needs or that would match his interest.