AWESOME stories

EARLY LIFE



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Vincent made this pencil-on-paper sketch of "Mills in the Neighborhood of Dordrecht"—one of his earliest works—in 1877. The drawing is now owned by the van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. Image online, courtesy Wikipaintings. PD

One year to the day after her first child was stillborn, Anna Cornelia van Gogh (1819-1907) had another baby boy. She named her second son—born, at home, on March 30, 1853—after the first: Vincent Willem van Gogh. (Scroll down a bit on the linked name, then look to the right-side to hear the correct pronunciation of van Gogh.)

The family—three boys and three girls survived—lived in Groot Zundert, a town in the south of Holland.

Not much is known about Vincent's early life. His father, Theodorus van Gogh (1822-85), was the pastor of a small church (Dutch Reformed) which still stands in Zundert (pictured here as Vincent would have known his town). Like so many places in The Netherlands, Zundert has a windmill.

Vincent left school when he was fifteen. The next year, following in the footsteps of his uncles Cornelis and Vincent, he became an apprentice at an art dealership called Goupil & Cie, which was headquartered in Paris.

Relatively successful during his seven years at Goupil & Cie's gallery in The Hague (in this 24 March 1873 letter van Gogh asks his brother to check on a painting by Schotel since he may have a buyer for it), Vincent transferred to the company's London office in 1873.

Two years of living in Britain was good for Vincent. He especially liked visiting the country's museums and art galleries. British engravers, who produced illustrations for magazines like *The Graphic*, also made a good impression on the young van Gogh.

By 1875, Vincent was working in Goupil's Paris office. No longer interested in the paintings he was selling, he left the company and returned to Britain in the early spring of 1876. Van Gogh was twenty-three years old when he took a teaching position at a school in Ramsgate.

Although his letters indicate that he enjoyed teaching, during the summer of 1876 he thought about becoming a pastor. He convinced his latest employer—Rev. Thomas Slade-Jones in Isleworth—to help him learn the role of a clergyman. Vincent's sermons were uninspiring, however, and he returned to The Netherlands.

Initially, Vincent worked at a bookstore in Dordrecht, where his Uncle Cent had secured a position for him. While there, he frequently visited a museum and read religious books. Then he went to Amsterdam, to begin his theological studies.

After fifteen months of studying for the ministry, in Amsterdam, Vincent left his formal training. Among other things, he wasn't proficient in Greek, Latin and math. He later described this period as "the worst time of my life."

He wasn't giving up on his goal of helping others, however. Obtaining permission from his church, Vincent moved to the coal-mining district of The Borinage in Belgium. His plan was to be a lay preacher to some of the poorest people in western Europe.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/EARLY-LIFE-Vincent-Van-Gogh

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/EARLY-LIFE-Vincent-Van-Gogh

Questions 2 Ponder

How Do We Find Our Calling?

Vincent van Gogh bounced-around, from job to job, as he tried to find his calling (or purpose) in life. Nothing seemed to work until he realized that he was meant to be an artist.

What does it mean to have "a calling" in life? Is there a difference between "a calling" and "a job?" What is the difference? Could "a calling" and "a job" be the same? Why, or why not?

Vincent seemed to find his purpose, or calling in life, when he discovered his passion for creating art. His ability to draw and paint allowed him to create stellar art over the years, but van Gogh was unable to sell his art work. If, like Vincent, we are drawn to a particular field of work—but those endeavors don't result in payment for a long period of time—have we misunderstood our calling?

What if, like Vincent, our calling to a particular field is genuine, but it takes years of effort to generate income? Is it better to stick with what we love to do—and are really good at doing it—or to find a different job that at least helps us to earn a living?

Media Stream



Vincent's Mother - Anna Cornelia van Gogh
Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons. PD
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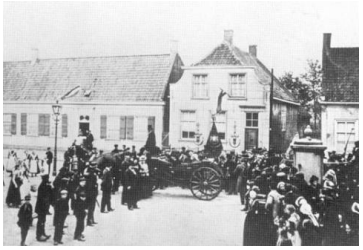

Birthplace - Vincent van Gogh
Image online, courtesy Kunstbeeld Nederland (a Dutch-language website). PD
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Birth Town of Vincent van Gogh - Zundert
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Map of the Netherlands

Image online, courtesy Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas at Austin.
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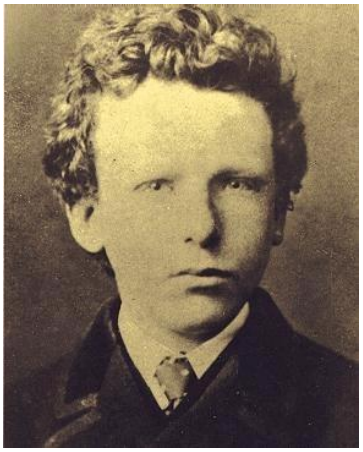

Boyhood - Vincent van Gogh, Age 13

Photo, courtesy van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.
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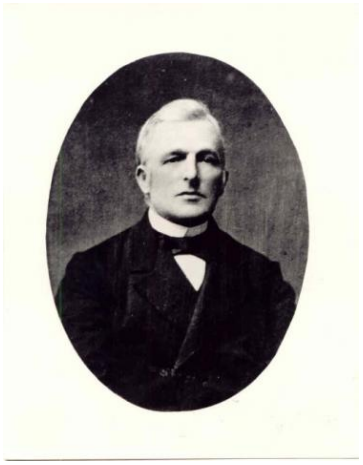

Vincent's Father - Theodorus van Gogh

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons. PD
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Church in Zundert - Pastored by van Gogh's Father

Image online, courtesy Kunstbeeld Nederland (a Dutch-language website). PD

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Hometown View - Zundert in the Late 1800s

Image online, courtesy Kunstbeeld Nederland (a Dutch-language website). PD

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Windmill in Zundert

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.
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Childhood Namesake - Uncle Vincent van Gogh

Image online, courtesy Kunstbeeld Nederland (a Dutch-language website). PD

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Early Career - Vincent van Gogh, Age 19

Photo, courtesy van Gogh Museum.
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Location of The Hague, Netherlands

Map image online, courtesy University of Seville (a Spanish-language website).
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Nineteenth-Century Scene - Amsterdam

Image online, courtesy University of Seville (a Spanish-language website) and its illustrated biography of Vincent van Gogh.

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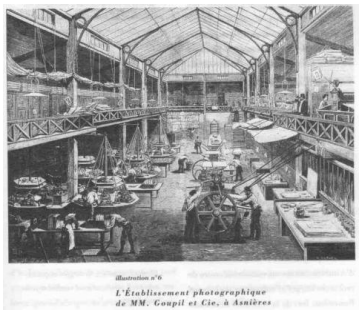

Goupil & Cie

This engraving, depicting Goupil & Co in 1873, was published in the review *L' Illustration*, No 1572, on April 12, 1873. Image, courtesy Ministry of Culture, France. (See Documents and Archives section.)

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Isleworth, England - Place of Study for van Gogh

Image online, courtesy University of Seville (a Spanish-language website) and its illustrated biography of Vincent van Gogh.

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Ramsgate - Royal Victoria Pavilion and Pier

Image, vintage postcard.

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Ramsgate, England - Location

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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van Gogh - Vincent Studies with a Cleric

Image online, courtesy University of Seville (a Spanish-language website) and its illustrated biography of Vincent van Gogh.

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van Gogh's Workplace - Gallery in The Hague

Image online, courtesy University of Seville (a Spanish-language website) and its illustrated biography of Vincent van Gogh.

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Mining in the Borinage

Misère au Borinage, by Joris Ivens, is a 34-minute silent film in black and white. Image online, courtesy University of Seville (a Spanish-language website) and its illustrated biography of Vincent van Gogh.

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Mining District - Borinage, Belgium

Image online, courtesy University of Seville (a Spanish-language website) and its illustrated biography of Vincent van Gogh.

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Map of The Borinage

Image online, courtesy Vincent van Gogh Gallery. PD

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