

Things You Wouldn't Believe

Phil Hansen

*This piece was created on-site at the 2011 Cherry Creek Arts Festival
with the interaction of the general public.*

Title: Van Gogh *Sunflowers*

Overview:

In this two-part lesson, students learn about Vincent Van Gogh and his *Sunflowers* series of paintings. Students will create their own Sunflower paintings in Part One.

In Part Two of Van Gogh *Sunflowers*, students will grow sunflowers as a class project, and observe and record the growth stages using a Sunflower Stages of Growth Diary. While keeping the sunflower diary, they will learn about, measure, record and draw the growth stages of the sunflowers.

Finally, students will harvest, roast and eat sunflower seeds.

Subjects

Visual Art, Science, Mathematics, Health Education

Age Group :

Late Elementary (Grades 3 - 5)

Standards:

21st Century Learning Skills

- Critical Thinking and Reasoning
- Information Literacy
- Collaboration

- Self-Direction
- Invention
- Skills for Living in the World

Colorado Academic Standards:

Visual Arts (Part One)

- Observe and Learn to Comprehend
- Envision and Critique to Reflect
- Invent and Discover to Create
- Relate and Connect to Transfer

Science (Part Two)

- *Life Science*
 - Students know and understand the characteristics and structure of living things, the processes of life, and how living things interact with each other and their environment.

Mathematics (Part Two)

- Data Analysis, Statistics and Probability
- Shape, Dimension and Measurements

Health Education (Part Two)

- Physical and Personal Wellness

Essential Question(s):

Visual Art:

- *How do people express themselves through art?*
- *How does art help us tell people our feelings?*
- *What choices must a painter make before beginning a work?*
- *What inspires me?*

Science:

- *What do living things need to grow and thrive?*
- *What is the life cycle of a plant?*
- *What are the parts of a plant?*

Guiding Question:

- *Artist Phil Hansen asked project participants to answer the question, "Tell me something unbelievable that has happened in your life. What is an experience you have had that shocked you or caused disbelief?"*
- *Why do you think the artist decided to depict Van Gogh in this project?*

Rationale:

By creating a painting based on Van Gogh's famous *Sunflowers* series, students will have hands-on experience with the creative process while learning about the techniques and approaches of one of history's most famous artists.

Objectives:

Students will:

(Part One)

- Learn about the artwork *Things You Wouldn't Believe*, by artist Phil Hansen
- Explore the sunflower-based artwork of Van Gogh
- Create their own sunflower-based artwork

(Part Two)

- Discover the parts of a plant
- Learn about the life cycle of a sunflower plant
- Plant and grow sunflowers
- Observe the growth of a sunflower from seed to mature plant
- Record the growth of a sunflower from seed to mature plant

Materials:

- Ability to project YouTube videos
- Video of Phil Hansen's Van Gogh Project:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v65x5cq8wvg#t=19>
- Book: *Camille and the Sunflowers* by Lawrence Anholt, **OR**
- Video for *Camille and the Sunflowers* by Lawrence Anholt:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qfRj0E0OzMY>
- *Sunflowers* video, Philadelphia Museum of Art:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEf7Y8UtEsM>
- Optional book: *Getting to Know Van Gogh* by Mike Venezia
- Student Handout #1: Van Gogh's Sunflowers PDF (1 per student, or the ability to project the images on a wall or screen)
- Optional: vase and sunflowers for a still life arrangement
- 12" x 18" white sulphite paper (heavier paper is better)
- Acrylic or tempera paints in assorted colors (Have plenty of yellows.)
- Assorted paintbrushes of different thicknesses
- Pencils and erasers
- Black Sharpies (thick and medium points)
- Containers with water to soak and wash the brushes and tools
- Newspapers or other materials to cover work areas
- Paper towels or rags to dry off tools between different paints
- Optional: Painting aprons or cover-ups
- *The Art and the Artist* information on *Things You Wouldn't Believe* (found at the end of this lesson plan); ability to project images on a wall or screen

Duration:

Two 40-minute sessions

Vocabulary:

- *Still Life*: a painting or drawing of an arrangement of objects, typically including fruit and flowers and objects contrasting with these in texture, such as bowls and glassware.
- *Impressionism*: a style or movement in painting originating in France in the 1860s, characterized by depicting the visual impression of the moment, especially in terms of the shifting effect of light and color.
- *Post-Impressionism*: the work or style of artists of the late 19th-century and early 20th-century, including Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Cézanne. They painted with emotion, intellect, and the eye, freely using color and form to express feeling and movement.
- *Vincent Van Gogh*: a Dutch post-impressionist artist whose work is known for its vivid colors and unrestrained brush strokes, creating powerful emotional impact. His paintings became famous after his death in 1890. Today he is widely regarded as one of history's greatest painters.
 - Van Gogh often applied thick paint with heavy strokes. Sometimes he painted so fast he didn't even mix his colors. He used paint right out of the tube.
 - Van Gogh is also known for his troubled life. He suffered from depression, lived in an asylum for a time, and is thought to have committed suicide. The suicide has been disputed in the most recent Van Gogh biography *Van Gogh: The Life*.

Lesson (Part One - Visual Art):

Preparation: Assemble books, videos and art materials and set up painting space.

1. Introduce students to the artist Vincent Van Gogh.

- Read aloud (or show video) *Camille and the Sunflowers, a Story About Vincent Van Gogh* by Lawrence Anholt.
- Explain that sunflowers had a special significance for Vincent; he made eleven paintings of sunflowers.
 - The color yellow symbolized happiness for Van Gogh.
- Show Sunflowers video, Philadelphia Museum of Art:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEf7Y8UtEsM>
- Discuss the life of Van Gogh so students will "get to know him."
 - See *Vocabulary* and *Additional Resources* in this lesson plan for information.

2. Explain that students will create their own version of a sunflower painting.

- Pass out Student Handout #1: Van Gogh's Sunflowers PDF (1 per student, or the ability to project the images on a wall or screen)
 - Lead students in a compare and contrast discussion of the four paintings. Ask Guiding Questions, such as, *How are the paintings alike? How are they different?*
 - Some possible observations include: *background colors are different; table colors are different; all four paintings include sunflowers at various life cycle stages; the overall composition of the paintings are very similar; the vases are similar size and shape but different colors; some paintings have more texture than others (thicker paint in some areas); the background table lines are similar, etc.*
- Lead the students in initial sketching:
 - With pencil, eraser, and paper, and using Van Gogh's paintings as a starting point, ask students to begin drawing.
 - Draw a U-shaped vase near, but not touching, the bottom of the page. Don't draw the top of the vase.
 - Draw a big circle above the opening of the vase (this is the dominant flower). Draw other circles and ovals around it.
 - Add a table line behind the vase, on the bottom $\frac{1}{4}$ of the paper.

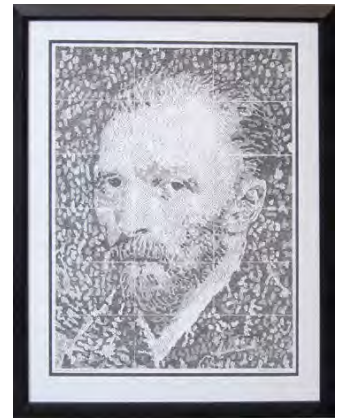
- Add petals on the dominant flower.
- Add more petals, trying different sizes and shapes, and tucking them all behind the dominant flower.
- Add some stems, and draw a line to close off the top of the vase.
- Have students begin painting.
 - First, have them paint the background and the table. Have students select two colors.
- At this point, allow the paintings to dry overnight.
- Finish painting.
 - Have students paint the other sections of the painting: the flower centers, the petals, the stems, and finally, the vase.
 - Have the students add shade and light to the vase:
 - Apply color to the vase, and while the paint is wet, dip brush in some white paint. Using a horizontal stroke, paint along one edge of the vase, blending color as you go.
- The final step is to use a black sharpie to outline all lines, including flower centers, petals, stems, the vase, the table, etc. Make sure the other paints are dry when you do this.
- Create a gallery for your sunflower paintings.

3. Show and discuss *Things You Wouldn't Believe*.

- Show YouTube video of artist Phil Hansen creating *Things You Wouldn't Believe* for the 2011 Cherry Creek Arts Festival.
 - Remind students that the artwork was a collaborative project that culminated during the 2011 Arts Festival.
 - The artist asked participants to share their answers to the questions: *"Tell me something unbelievable that has happened in your life. What is an experience you have had that shocked you or caused disbelief?"*
 - Ask students to share some of their own answers to this question.
 - Ask students why they think the artist selected Van Gogh to depict in this project?

4. This concludes Part One of Van Gogh *Sunflowers*. In Part Two, students will plant sunflowers and use a Sunflower Diary to learn about and record the growth stages of a sunflower.

The Art and the Artist



Things You Wouldn't Believe

Phil Hansen

Ink on Paper

Collaborative Work

This piece was created on-site at the 2011 Cherry Creek Arts Festival with the interaction of the general public.

Phil Hansen is a groundbreaking, innovative artist internationally renowned for creating public dialogue with art. He worked with the Cherry Creek Arts Festival to create a collaborative piece of artwork based upon the question he asked the public, *"Tell me something unbelievable that has happened in your life. What is an experience you have had that shocked you or caused disbelief?"*

People shared their stories with Phil stories electronically, as well as communicating directly with him at the Arts Festival. Over 1000 peoples' stories were written in sharpie on paper to create this image of a shocking figure in Art History: Vincent Van Gogh. The original piece that was completed on-site is 12ft X 7ft.

Additional Resources

To view more examples of the artwork of Phil Hansen, visit his website:

- <http://philinthecircle.com/tesla.html>
- *More Van Gogh Resources:*
 - http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/learn-about-art/paintings-in-depth/sunflowers-symbols-of-happiness/*/viewPage/1
 - <http://www.vangoghgallery.com>

Van Gogh's Sunflowers



Still Life: Vase with Five Sunflowers
Oil on canvas
Arles: August, 1888
Destroyed by Fire in the Second World War



Still Life: Three Sunflowers in a Vase
Oil on canvas
Arles: August, 1888



Still Life: Vase with Twelve Sunflowers
Oil on canvas
Arles: August, 1888



Still Life: Vase with Fifteen Sunflowers
Oil on canvas
Arles: August, 1888