

## Mr Van Gogh by Owen Marshall

Vincent Van Gogh was born in Holland in 1853. Throughout his life he maintained his belief in his art. Despite desperate poverty he never compromised and painted in an original and experimental way using bright colours and thick paint or just bits of grass to depict his individual view of nature. Poverty and mental illness led to his suicide in a cornfield at Auvers-sur-Oise in France in 1890.

The art world failed to recognize his talents when he was alive but after his death his pictures became increasingly sought after. Now classed as a Post-Impressionist his pictures of simple subjects like daffodils, irises or a chair have sold for over \$60 million apiece! Van Gogh's tragedy is a classic example of the artist only achieving fame after death. His name has now come to symbolise the individual's battle with an unappreciative society. A biopic 'Lust for Life' with Kirk Douglas, and Don McLean's 'Starry Starry Night' song were both about the painter.

1. What is the effect of the first sentence?
2. How many times do the words Van Gogh get used in this short story? Wonder why.
3. What's in a name? Frank Reprieve Wilcox? Mr Souness?
4. How does Mr Souness describe the painter? "He was another ---/-----."
5. How did Mr Van Gogh stand when they're laughing? "With his arms....."
6. What's the significance of this?
7. What is next to his wooden bungalow?
8. How does Mr Van Gogh get money to live?
9. What was yellow the colour of? -----/-----
10. What colour predominates in the concrete/literal description of Mr Van Gogh's appearance?
11. What sort of narrator does the story have?
12. What age is he? What do we know about him?
13. What was Mr Van Gogh's "only problem"?

14. Put into your own words the aphorism: "A naked intensity of belief is an obscene exposure in ordinary conversation"
15. Why does the council want to knock Mr Van Gogh's bungalow down?
16. What does this represent?
17. What month is it going to take place? Link to 15.
18. The glass interior of the bungalow is described in vivid, graphic detail. What's a 'homage'?
19. "Mr Van Gogh lay like clay?" What does this simile communicate to us?
20. "His face was the colour of a plucked chicken." What is the effect of this metaphor?
21. What saying of the painter do the 'green glass cubes' spell out?
22. Explain what the last part of the saying means.
23. What "...defied Mr Van Gogh's drained face?"
24. What is the irony in the name of the person who smashes up a lot of the pictures?
25. The writing is richly descriptive. What literary devices are used in the following passage and to what effect?

"Part of the passage rose sheer from the wreckage for a moment, like a face card from a worn deck. All the glass in all its patterns spangled and glistened in yellow, red and green. Just that one projection, that's all, like the vivid, hot intestines of the old house, and then the stringy walls encompassed the panel again, and stretched and tore. The house collapsed like an old elephant in the drought, surrounded by so many enemies."
26. There are three similes. How imaginative, graphic, successful are they? Why?
27. Why does Marshall use such extraordinary imagery?
28. By calling this story 'pseudo-fiction' we recognize that its author is writing about real issues in his, and our society. What concerns does this story raise?
29. How does Owen Marshall's prose 'mirror' Mr Van Gogh's bungalow?
30. The artists Van Gogh and Mr Van Gogh share a predicament with N.Z.'s Owen Marshall. What is it?