***Vincent (Starry Starry Night)* – Don McLean**

**Teacher’s Notes**

This song, although a little downbeat, has extremely poetic lyrics and is a great jumping-off point for discussions about art, creativity, mental health, etc.

**Level:** Upper-Intermediate, Advanced

**Skills:** listening for key words, decoding skills, discussion and presentation skills

1. Write the following quiz questions on the board, perhaps with one of Van Gogh’s self-portraits. Ask students to complete the quiz in pairs, then pass their answers on and mark another pair’s answers.

**Vincent Van Gogh Quiz:**

1. What year was Van Gogh born? (1853) (give two points for the correct answer, one for any date within 10 years either side)
2. What country was he from originally? (the Netherlands)
3. What country did he spend many years in? (France)
4. How did he die? (He shot himself) (one point if either shooting or suicide are mentioned; two points if both are mentioned)
5. What artistic movement was he associated with? (Impressionism)
6. There is a period of Van Gogh's work associated with which colour? (Blue)
7. Listen to the first two verses of the song (don’t show the video or give out the handouts yet) and ask students to note down all the colours they hear, and all the nature features (including plants, animals, landscapes, weather etc.). You could ask students to split the workload, with one student from each pair focussing on colours, and the other on nature features. Compare answers in pairs and then as a whole class.

*Answers: Colours: blue, grey, violet, china blue, hue, amber.*

*Nature: starry night, summer’s day, shadows, hills, trees, daffodils, breeze, winter chills, land, snow, flowers, clouds, haze, morning, fields, grain*

1. Give out the handout and listen to the whole song, starting again from the beginning. (Still not showing the video!) Tell students to correct the mistakes in the lyrics. If you want to make it slightly easier, you can tell them that all the verses and the chorus have three mistakes each.

*Answers: Verse 1: pick – paint; song – soul; lemon – linen. Chorus: vanity – sanity; make – set; because – perhaps. Verse 2: crowds – clouds; through – hue; father’s – artist’s. Verse 3: leave – love; home – hope; made – meant. Verse 4: pictures – portraits; war – world; crashed – crushed.*

1. Put students in pairs and make sure each pair has access to a phone or tablet with internet access. Ask each pair to focus on a different verse (or the chorus). Using Google Images, they should search for Van Gogh paintings to use in a slideshow to be played alongside the song. They should save each picture on their phone so they can display them easily later, or write down the titles and dates so that you can display them quickly on the IWB.
2. Ask each pair to present the images they have chosen and to briefly describe them and say why they chose them. (NB this section can really drag, but it’s great presentation practice – so encourage them to be concise and interesting, not waffly and predictable.) If you like, you can show them the images in the YouTube video and ask them to notice similarities and differences.
3. Put the following discussion questions on the board and rearrange students into small groups to discuss these ideas.

**Discussion questions: Van Gogh**

- What is your favourite line from the song? Why?

- Do you like Van Gogh’s paintings in general? Why/why not?

- Out of the pictures you’ve looked at today, which one(s) would you like to hang in your house? Which ones do you think are the most thought-provoking?

- It has been said that great artists always suffer for their art – do you think that’s true?

- Do you know of any other artists who have had depression or committed suicide? Do you think there’s a connection between mental health problems and artistic talent?

**Discussion questions: Creativity and Inspiration**

- Do you believe that everyone is creative? What different kinds of creativity are there?

- Why is creativity important in individuals' lives, and in wider society?

- In what ways are you creative? In what areas do you struggle with creativity?

- What has inspired you recently? In which areas have you felt lacking in inspiration? What do you do when you need inspiration?

- What advice would you give to an artist who is suffering from a lack of inspiration?

***Vincent (Starry Starry Night)* – Don McLean**

*There are several wrong words in these lyrics – listen and correct them.*

Starry, starry night

Pick your palette blue and grey

Look out on a summer's day

With eyes that know the darkness in my song

Shadows on the hills

Sketch the trees and the daffodils

Catch the breeze and the winter chills

In colours on the snowy lemon land

*Now I understand*

*What you tried to say to me*

*And how you suffered for your vanity*

*And how you tried to make them free*

*They would not listen*

*They did not know how*

*Because they'll listen now*

Starry, starry night

Flaming flowers that brightly blaze

Swirling crowds in violet haze

Reflect in Vincent's eyes of china blue

Colours changing through

Morning fields of amber grain

Weathered faces lined in pain

Are smoothed beneath the father’s loving hand

*Chorus*

For they could not leave you

But still your love was true

And when no home was left inside

On that starry, starry night

You took your life as lovers often do

But I could have told you, Vincent

This world was never made for one

As beautiful as you

Starry, starry night

Pictures hung in empty halls

Frameless heads on nameless walls

With eyes that watch the war and can't forget

Like the strangers that you've met

The ragged men in ragged clothes

The silver thorn of bloody rose

Lie crashed and broken on the virgin snow

*Now I think I know*

*What you tried to say to me*

*And how you suffered for your vanity*

*And how you tried to make them free*

*They would not listen*

*They're not listening still*

*Because they never will*

***Vincent (Starry Starry Night)***

**Don McLean 1971**

Starry, starry night  
Paint your palette blue and gray  
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  
And how you suffered for your sanity  
And 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 fields of amber grain  
Weathered faces lined in pain  
Are soothed beneath the artist's loving hand  
  
*Chorus*  
  
For they could not love you  
But still your love was true  
And when no hope was left inside  
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 heads on nameless walls  
With eyes that watch the world and can't forget  
Like the strangers that you've met  
The ragged men in 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  
And how you suffered for your sanity  
And how you tried to set them free  
They would not listen  
They're not listening still  
Perhaps they never will*