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Looking at Van Gogh

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Van  
Gogh  
Museum  
Amsterdam

# Japanese style

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Welcome to the Van Gogh Museum! Learn all about Vincent van Gogh's work with this guide. Form your own, personal opinion of his paintings. Make use of what you see, what you *know*, and what you can *find out*.

Vincent was crazy about Japanese woodcuts. You can see their influence in his paintings. But to recognise it, you need to know a bit about Japanese woodcuts. That's why we made this for you.

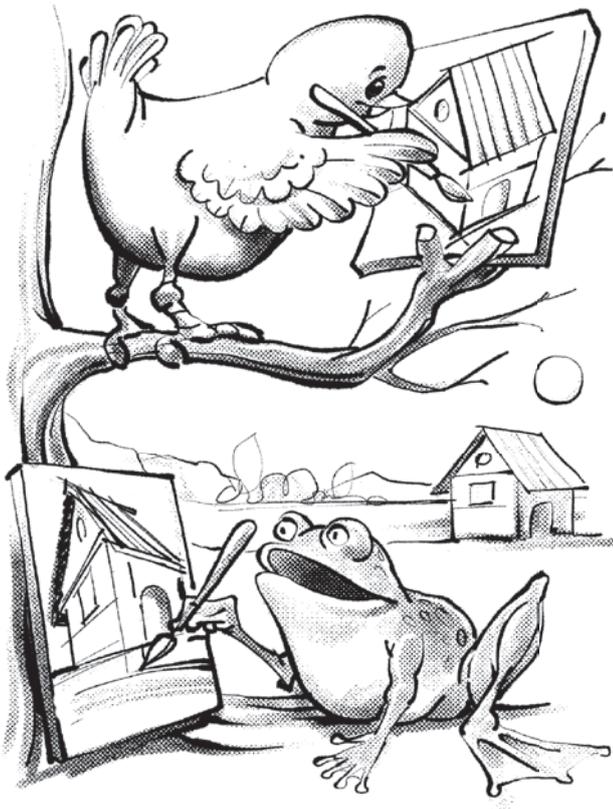


# 1 Japanese style

A woodcut is an impression on paper from a woodblock, which has had a picture cut into it with a knife. Vincent borrowed lots of elements from Japanese art, such as the bright colours and bold contrasts. Which of the features listed below do you see in this woodcut?

## Shape

- The shapes are outlined with clear contours.
- The shapes have no outlines, or hardly any.
- People and things are flat and simplified (distillation).
- People and things look amazingly real (realism).



Utagawa Hiroshige *The Residence with Plum Trees at Kameido, 1857*

## Composition\*

- The point of view is high (bird's eye view).
- The point of view is low (frog perspective).
- The subject is cropped at the edge.
- The subject fits inside the edges.

\*Composition: the way objects are placed in the image; the arrangement.

# 2 Choose a painting

Now you're going to use the features you just identified. Choose a painting with two or more Japanese characteristics. Which did you choose?

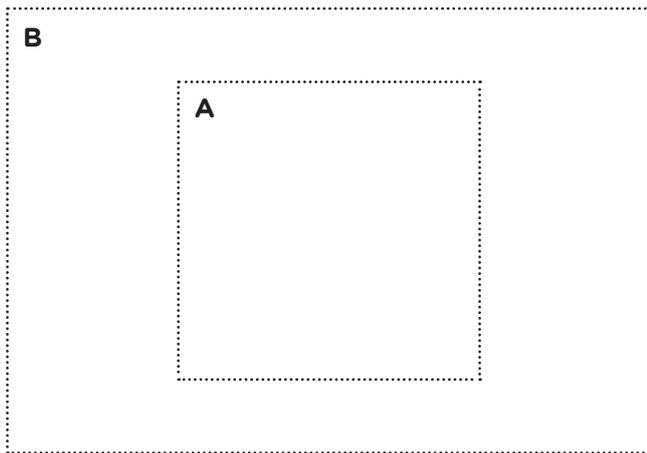
Title .....
Year .....
Place .....

### 3 Vincent versus Japan

- A** What is the subject of this painting? Describe what you see: .....
- B** Which Japanese elements do you see in this painting?
- Clear contours
  - Distillation
  - Cropped subject
  - Bird's eye view

### 4 Composition

- A** Draw the painting's most important lines in the inner square. This helps you to see the composition more clearly.
- B** Do you see the lines in the painting which stop at the edge of the canvas? Draw them beyond the edge they way you think they continue.



### 5 Vincent in Japan?

- A** Vincent never went to Japan - that was too far and expensive in those days. So he sought out the Japanese world closer to home. Where did Vincent live when he made this work?
- He lived in .....
- B** Are you standing at a painting that Vincent copied from a Japanese print, or one he painted of his own surroundings?
- Japanese print
  - His surroundings
- C** Was the painting made after a Japanese print? Then look for another work with Japanese influences, depicting Vincent's surroundings. Fill in the title below:
- .....
- Is it mostly Vincent's surroundings that you see, and nothing much Japanese? Then look for another work with Japanese influences, where he used a print as his starting point. Write the title below.
- .....

