

The Courtauld

Favourite Place Triptych

Devised by Millie Nice



↑ Vincent van Gogh, Peach Trees in Blossom, 1889, oil on canvas, The Courtauld, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust) © The Courtauld

Take some time to look closely at the painting. Do you like it?

What if we imagine it's not a painting. As you answer the questions below take your time and use your imagination as fully as possible.

Imagine:

Imagine you have gone out walking down this dusty road, how is the weather today?
Imagine you stop to look over the fence, how does the fence feel under your fingers?
How does the grass feel against your ankles?

Lean on the fence and relax, what can you see?

Can you see the blossom on the trees? Can you imagine how it moves in the breeze?

These trees will grow peaches, can you smell the fruit?

There's someone working among the trees, do you see them?

There are houses in the distance, do you think that's where this person lives?

Look out into the distance, can you see the mountain? How long will it take to walk there?

There isn't a car or a bus so you'd better get going but look up at the clouds in the sky,
do you think it's going to rain?

Introduction:

Although originally from the Netherlands Vincent Van Gogh (1853 – 1890) had been living in Paris but in 1888 moved to Arles in the south of France. When he arrived there it was cold and snowy, he described it as “another world”, very different to anything he’d seen before. When he went walking he noticed that winter was turning into spring and the trees were blossoming. It cheered him up to see the fresh new blossoms come from the old rough trees.

The trees reminded him of prints he liked from Japan of cherry blossoms. He liked how they had bright colours and beautiful blossoms and mountains and he found all of those things in Arles. He wanted to make his own pictures of the blossoms but he had to work quickly before the blossom was gone. He walked out to the fields and painted during the day and he went home and painted from memory at night. After a month he had made over 14 paintings. He said he hoped the blossoms would “cheer everyone up”. When he was working on them he said he wanted to find what was “essential in the drawings”.

Have you ever moved or visited somewhere new outside of the place where you live?
When you walk somewhere what cheers you up when you see it?

Have you ever liked a place so much you wanted to make a picture of it to remember?

Have you ever tried to draw something so complicated you had to leave some bits out and focus on your favourite bits?

Triptychs:

A triptych (pronounced trip-tick), is three pictures next to each other that show similar things three different ways. Although there is only documentation of one triptych of three of Van Gogh’s blossom paintings we know from letters he wrote at the time that he was thinking about arranging others into groups of three. Triptychs were first used in early Christian art but many artists have since use this way of exploring an image or idea from three viewpoints or using it as a way to tell a story.

You are going to make a triptych of a place that cheers you up.

Materials:

- A piece of paper and a pencil for your triptych.
- Spare paper for practicing mark making.
- Optional: coloured pencils.

Step 1

First create a triptych from a piece of paper.

Fold your paper in half lengthways.

Fold your paper again into thirds and fold one side forward and one side back.

It should be a ‘z’ shape.

This is your triptych - three pictures joined together.

On one side you are going to learn from Van Gogh and try to work out how he made his pictures.

On the other side you are going to make a triptych of your own of a favourite place.

Step 2



Take a look at Van Gogh's drawing and the marks he makes, it can be easier to see the marks in pencil than in paint.

Using just a pencil practice copying some of the marks he makes on your spare paper. How many different marks does he make? Short, long, dark, thin, what else?

← Vincent van Gogh, A Tile Factory, (1888), pen and brown ink, The Courtauld, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust) © The Courtauld

Step 3

Now look back at his painting. Choose your favourite part of the painting of the blossom trees and try and draw it in the middle section of your triptych using just pencil marks.

Step 4

Choose part of the room you are in.

Draw this in one of the remaining thirds of your paper experimenting with the same range of marks you learnt from Van Gogh's drawing.

Step 5

Take a look out of the window or go outside.

Choose an area of what you can see outside and draw it in the last section of the triptych using the same marks. Do you need to invent some new ones? Add the new ones to your practice sheet of paper so you have your own vocabulary of marks.

Step 6

Turn your paper over – you have another blank triptych on the back!

First take a moment to remember a place you have enjoyed walking in. It might be somewhere you visited, local streets, a park or a playground, try and think of somewhere that cheers you up.

You are going to make three different drawings again but this time they will be a different part of the same place. Think about which part will go in which section of your paper.

Use all the marks that you learnt from Van Gogh as well as the ones you invented yourself to make a picture of a place that cheers you up every time you look at it. You can do it in pencil or use coloured pencils if you have them.

You can share your finished drawing with someone and tell them about the place.

Extension Activity:

A week after you have made your triptychs have a close look at them again. Does it help you remember Van Gogh's paintings and drawings? Does it remind you of a favourite place, does it cheer you up?