



## Art Masterpiece

1<sup>st</sup> Grade

### Core knowledge Topics:

#### **Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci**

We're learning about portrait paintings and talking about one of Vincent Van Gogh's Self Portraits and Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa.

**About Vincent Van Gogh:** Van Gogh was born in 1853 in Holland. He was the oldest of eight children. When he was 16 years old, he worked for a firm of art dealers. Several members of his family were also art dealers. He lived in many places, visited many art galleries and studied art himself. After moving to London, he became a teacher then later a missionary. He helped the poor in a coal-mining district and was very poor himself. He gave away all his possessions and devoted himself to the people. He became very weak, tired and hungry and eventually stopped preaching and began painting. His brother, Theo was his biggest supporter and helped him study art. Eventually he moved to Paris where Theo lived and he met Impressionist painters like Degas and Gauguin.. Van Gogh moved to a city in the South of France and was a very productive artist. He rented a small house, painting in yellow (which is his favorite color). There he worked at his paintings all day long. In the fifteen months he lived there, he produced over two hundred paintings! Van Gogh had a troubled life and one day in after quarreling with a friend, he cut off his own ear. Van Gogh died at 37 years old and in his lifetime he only sold one painting. Van Gogh painted many masterpieces of nature and humanity. He was very sensitive to the struggles of others. He was always seeking calm light and peacefulness which you can see in many of his paintings. One of the most expensive paintings ever sold was Van Gogh's "Portrait of Dr. Gachet" which sold for over eighty million dollars! Today many of his works are in a Van Gogh museum in Holland.

**About the Leonardo da Vinci:** In 1452, he was born in a small village in Italy, called Vinci which gave him his name. He started studying painting at age fourteen and continued for over thirteen years. He also studied other subjects such as mathematics, geometry, science, nature, architecture and sculpture. After completing his training he began his career as a painter with portraits and religious paintings. He was an engineer too. In fact, in his lifetime he was better known as an engineer than as a painter! Da Vinci was above all famous for his

talent of imitating nature to perfection. Everything was lifelike **and** you could sense the personality of the model he was painting. None is more famous than the Mona Lisa. Who is she? She is one of the most recognizable faces in the world, yet no one knows for sure who she is! She might be the wife of an Italian Nobleman who hired Da Vinci as a painter. It took him four years to paint her. He never gave the picture to the Nobleman who hired her, he carried it wherever he lived for many years. He eventually sold her to the King of France but always kept in France. It was stolen in 1911 from The Louvre, a famous museum in Paris, but recovered two years later. Someone also tried to pour acid on the painting to ruin it. Today, her picture is behind a bullet-proof glass in The Louvre in Paris, France.

**Vocabulary:**

**Impasto:** thick paint that is applied with a brush or palette knife and gives the surface a rough texture.

**Vibrant:** intensely bright and vivid

**Emotion:** a personal feeling such as sadness    **Self-portrait:** a painting, drawing or sculpture that represents the artist himself

**Profile:** a side view or drawing of someone's head

Remember there were no cameras during Da Vinci's time and very few during Van Gogh's lifetime so by painting they could show us about their life. Often they used lived models (what's that?) that had to sit for long periods of a time. How long could you sit still? Why do you think people wanted painting of themselves or their families? Explain what a profile is and how a profile and portrait are different from a full figure view. Do we have portraits today? When you look at the portrait, can you tell something about the person? Discuss the clothing of the person, their emotion, what items are included in the background, how does the artist feel about the person he is painting?

**Project:** Draw a self portrait



