

## Exemplar Informational Texts: History/Social Studies – Vincent Van Gogh: Portrait of an Artist

Greenberg, Jan, and Sandra Jordan. *Vincent Van Gogh: Portrait of an Artist*. New York: Random House, 2001. (2001)  
From Chapter 1, “A Brabant Boy 1853–75”

I have nature and art and poetry, if that is not enough what is?  
—Letter to Theo, January 1874

On March 30, 1853, the handsome, soberly dressed Reverend Theodorus van Gogh entered the ancient town hall of Groot-Zundert, in the Brabant, a province of the Netherlands. He opened the birth register to number twenty-nine, where exactly one year earlier he had sadly written “Vincent Willem van Gogh, stillborn.” Beside the inscription he wrote again “Vincent Willem van Gogh,” the name of his new, healthy son, who was sleeping soundly next to his mother in the tiny parsonage across the square. The baby’s arrival was an answered prayer for the still-grieving family.

The first Vincent lay buried in a tiny grave by the door of the church where Pastor van Gogh preached. The Vincent who lived grew to be a sturdy redheaded boy. Every Sunday on his way to church, young Vincent would pass the headstone carved with the name he shared. Did he feel as if his dead brother were the rightful Vincent, the one who would remain perfect in his parents’ hearts, and that he was merely an unsatisfactory replacement? That might have been one of the reasons he spent so much of his life feeling like a lonely outsider, as if he didn’t fit anywhere in the world.

Despite his dramatic beginning, Vincent had an ordinary childhood, giving no hint of the painter he would become. The small parsonage, with an upstairs just two windows wide under a slanting roof, quickly grew crowded. By the time he was six he had two sisters, Anna and Elizabeth, and one brother, Theo, whose gentle nature made him their mother’s favorite.

### Media Text

The Van Gogh Gallery, a commercial Web resource with links to Van Gogh’s art and information about his life: <http://www.vangoghgallery.com/>