

FEELS ART PROMPTS



Vincent Van Gogh (Dutch, 1853-1890), *Self-Portrait Dedicated to Paul Gauguin*, 1888, oil on canvas, 1951.65

F for FIRST IMPRESSIONS: (About 2 minutes.)

What stands out to you? What do you notice about the background?
How would you describe the way Van Gogh looks at you?

E for EXAMINE DETAILS: (5 Minutes)

What details do you notice about Van Gogh's features? His beard? His clothing?
How many colors can you see in his beard? His face?
Examine the brushstrokes. Do you notice their direction around his head and his right eye? How does Van Gogh use color to create contrast? What do you notice about the paint he uses to outline his lapels and the button on his shirt?

E for EXPLORE YOUR RESPONSES:

What do you think Van Gogh was hoping to express in his self-portrait?

Van Gogh paid careful attention to the bold outlines of his jacket and the button on his collar that stands up off the surface of the canvas. What pieces of clothing do you feel express your own vision of yourself?

L for LEARN ABOUT CONTEXT: (10-15 minutes. Feel free to write your responses or discuss them with others.)

After suffering from poor health as he struggled to make his way as a young artist working in Paris, Van Gogh believed the sunshine and warmer climate of Arles in the South of France would restore his strength. When he painted this portrait in 1888, he was already working there, and hoped that fellow artists he met in Paris and whose work he admired, especially Paul Gauguin and Émile Bernard, would join him. Vincent Van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo about his plan:

"This would be the beginnings of an association, then. Bernard, who's coming to the south too, would join us, and be sure of this, I still see you in France, at the head of an association of Impressionists. And if I could be useful in putting them together, I'd willingly see them abler than myself."

Van Gogh also wrote to Theo about this *Self-Portrait*:

"So now I have a chance to compare my painting with what the comrades are doing. My portrait, which I am sending to Gauguin in exchange, holds its own, I am sure of that. I have written to Gauguin in reply to his letter that if I might be allowed to stress my own personality in a portrait, I had done so trying to convey my portrait not only myself but an impressionist in general, had conceived it as the portrait of a bonze, a simple worshipper of the eternal Buddha." (A bonze is a Japanese or Chinese Buddhist monk.)

Proud of his self-portrait, Van Gogh inscribed across the top, "À mon ami, Gauguin," ("To my friend, Gauguin") and sent it to his friend. The inscription was painted out, probably when Gauguin sold the painting in Paris to support himself.

S for SHARE YOUR FEELINGS: (15 Minutes or more. Feel free to write your responses or discuss with others.)

Despite selling the *Self-Portrait*, Gauguin eventually joined Van Gogh in Arles, where they painted together for several months. In December of 1888, a violent argument erupted between them, causing a permanent rupture in their friendship. Gauguin left Arles and never spoke to Van Gogh again. Van Gogh harmed himself, slicing off his left ear. He later entered a local mental institution and took his life in 1890.

Have you ever taken a "selfie" of yourself that you felt especially proud of? Have you ever created something with a colleague or a friend that caused you to discover a dimension of your personality that you didn't know you had? How do our close friends and colleagues share our vision of the world?

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Do you have a favorite image that captures your happy times together with a close friend, even if you are no longer close to that person?

Please help us to improve the FEELS Art Prompts as we develop new ways for museum visitors to use the collections to explore their own feelings and cultivate a greater sense of well-being. Please complete and return this page. Feel free to add any additional comments on the back. Thank you for sharing your responses as we continue to refine the FEELS Prompts. (About 5-10 minutes.)

- 1) Have you ever visited a museum before today? Please circle one: YES NO
How many times per year do you visit a museum?
Number of times: 1-2 3-5 6-10 Your own estimated number of visits:

Please circle your response to the following statements:

- 2) The FEELS Prompts inspired me to consider Van Gogh's *Self-Portrait* in relation to my own experiences or responses.
Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Please provide any further thoughts or comments:

- 3) The FEELS Prompts offered me a way to explore emotional connection(s) to the work of art.
Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Further thoughts or comments:

- 4) The FEELS Prompts inspired reflection of my own memories or experiences.
Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Further thoughts or comments:

- 5) The FEELS Prompts inspired me to engage with other students in the gallery.
Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Further thoughts or comments:

- 6) The FEELS Prompts inspired a greater sense of self-reflection.
Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Further thoughts or comments:

- 7) The FEELS Prompts enabled me to recall experiences of interest to me.
Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Further thoughts or comments:

- 8) The FEELS Prompts created a greater sense of confidence in exploring my responses to Van Gogh's *Self-Portrait*.
Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Further thoughts or comments:

- 9) The quotes from Vincent Van Gogh's letters to his brother Theo enhanced the FEELS Prompts.
Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Further thoughts or comments:

- 10) I would tell a friend to use the FEELS Prompts when visiting the museum.
Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

- 11) What did you find most interesting about the FEELS Prompts? What did you enjoy least?

- 12) What would have made the FEELS Prompts better? (Feel free to use the back of the page.)

If you'd like to learn more about the FEELS Art Prompts project, please reach out to: Elliot Bostwick Davis, Ph.D., at elliott_davis@harvard.edu. Thank you for your input!

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