



## INTRODUCTION

VINCENT VAN GOGH is a world-famous artist. You've probably seen a painting by him somewhere before. *Sunflowers*, for example, or *The Starry Night*. If you ask people what they know about him, nearly everyone says, 'His ear!' or 'That poor artist! No one understood him!'

But not many people know Vincent's whole story. That's what we're going to tell you here. This book will take you with Vincent from Z to A: from Zundert in the southern Netherlands (where he was born) to Auvers-sur-Oise in France (where he died). We'll stop off at lots of different places in the Netherlands, England, Belgium and France. Was Vincent's end also the end of his story? Fortunately not! For many people, Vincent still lives on today – in his drawings and paintings.

All his life, Vincent was curious about things. He liked to go for long walks in the countryside, and through towns and villages that he didn't know yet. But there always came a time when he wanted to leave – to go to another village, another town, another country. Vincent travelled thousands of

kilometres. On foot. In carriages, or on boats. But especially on steam trains! They were very modern at the time. When Vincent was born (in 1853), there weren't many railway lines in Europe. But by the time he was an adult, he was able to travel almost anywhere by train. At high speed! Although... trains didn't actually go any faster than fifty kilometres an hour.

Steam trains transported people, and also post. Letters were sometimes delivered up to four times a day, at home and abroad. That was handy because people didn't have telephones or the internet back then. But when you're far away from your family and friends, you obviously want to let them know how you're doing. So did Vincent. His younger brother Theo, in particular, received post from Vincent every week. Vincent sent him letters and also the drawings and paintings that he made. And Theo kept everything: every letter, every painting, every sketch and scribble. As a result, we now have around 850 of Vincent's paintings, 1,300 drawings and more than 800 letters. They all tell a piece of Vincent's story.





Vincent liked reading books more than playing with the other children in the school playground, and he loved nature. He spent hours wandering on the heath and through the meadows, woods and marshes around Zundert.



# ZUNDERT

1853–1864

## The birthplace

This picture shows the house where Vincent was born, in the middle of the village of Zundert, in the south of the Netherlands. That house no longer exists. It was demolished more than a hundred years ago. No one knew at the time that it was the house where the world's most famous artist had been born. There is only one photograph with the house in it. This one. It happened by chance when the photographer wanted to take a picture of the man in the carriage, who was celebrating his hundredth birthday.



Vincent's parents were very respectable. They had household staff: a maid, two cooks and a gardener. The Van Gogh family went for a walk around the village every day – Vincent's mother in her hoop skirt, and his father in a top hat. The children followed behind, all dressed in nice clothes. Vincent was the eldest child. He had three sisters and two brothers. He slept in an attic room with his brother Theo, both in the same bed.



MOTHER



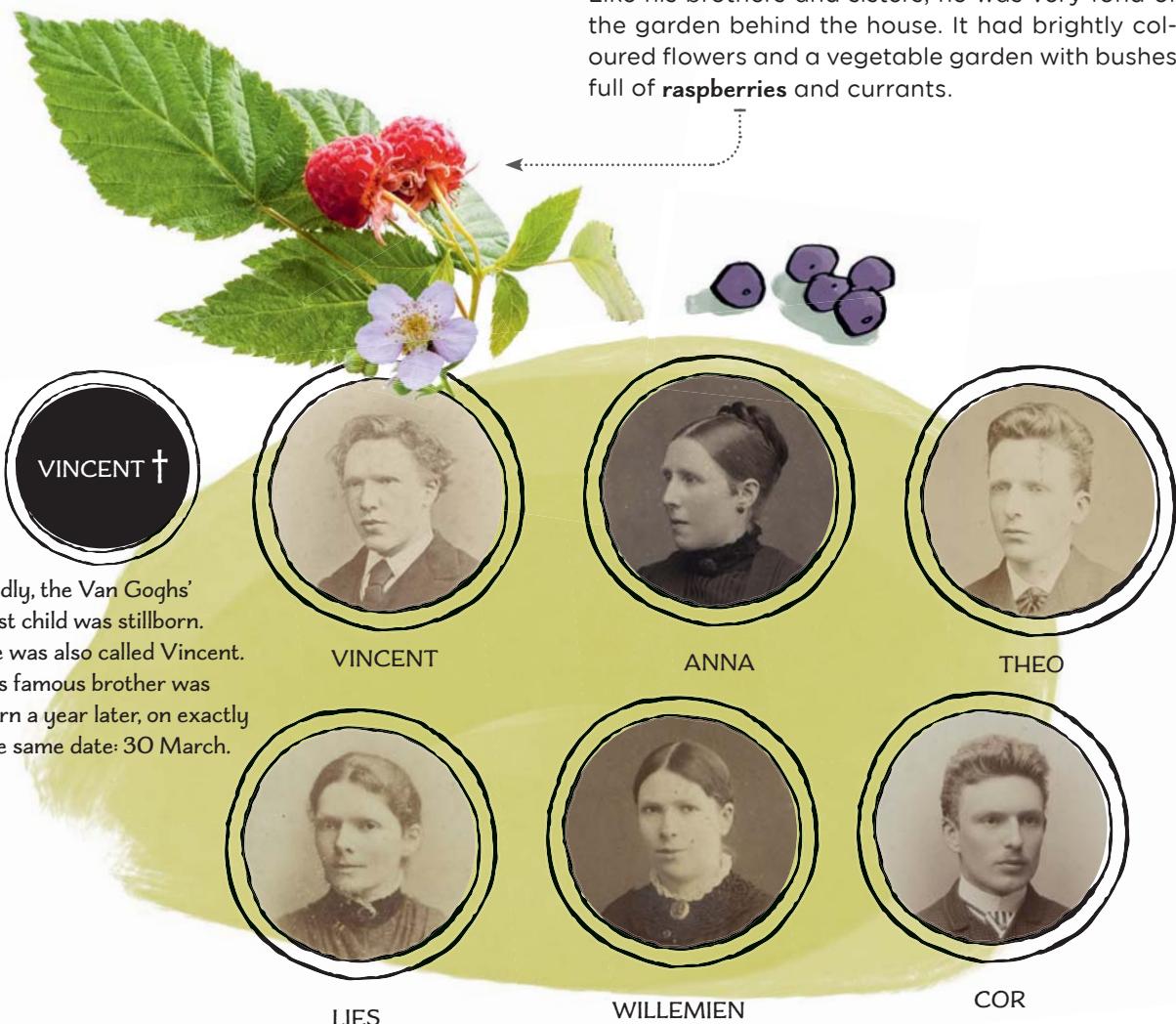
FATHER

## The Van Gogh family

Vincent's father was a church minister by profession. He led the services on Sundays and told people from the village about God and the Bible. Minister Van Gogh was very popular. When someone in the village was ill, he went to visit them. Sometimes he also paid for groceries for poor people. Everyone knew him, as he used to ride through the village in a yellow horse-drawn carriage.

Vincent's mother was always busy with jobs in and around the house. She taught her children to draw and make things and gave them exciting books to read. Devices like smartphones, tablets and television hadn't been invented yet. There was plenty of time in the evening to read books to each other, to play board games or to write long letters.

Mrs Van Gogh told her children all about plants and animals. That was nice for Vincent, who loved nature. He wandered for hours across the heathland and through the meadows, the woods and the marshes around Zundert, or he went down to the stream to catch beetles. Then he would pin them in white cardboard boxes and write their names beside them. He knew all their names by heart. Like his brothers and sisters, he was very fond of the garden behind the house. It had brightly coloured flowers and a vegetable garden with bushes full of **raspberries** and currants.



# NETHERLANDS

North Sea

Zuiderzee

Amsterdam

The Hague

Zevenbergen



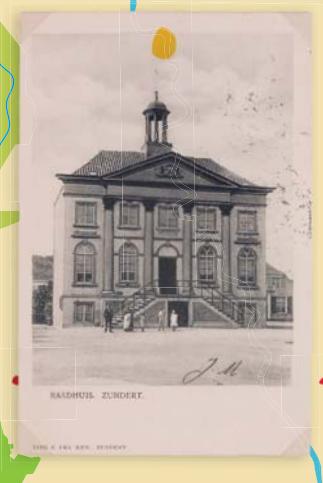
Zundert



Tilburg

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The town hall  
in Zundert.



Vincent lived directly opposite the primary school.

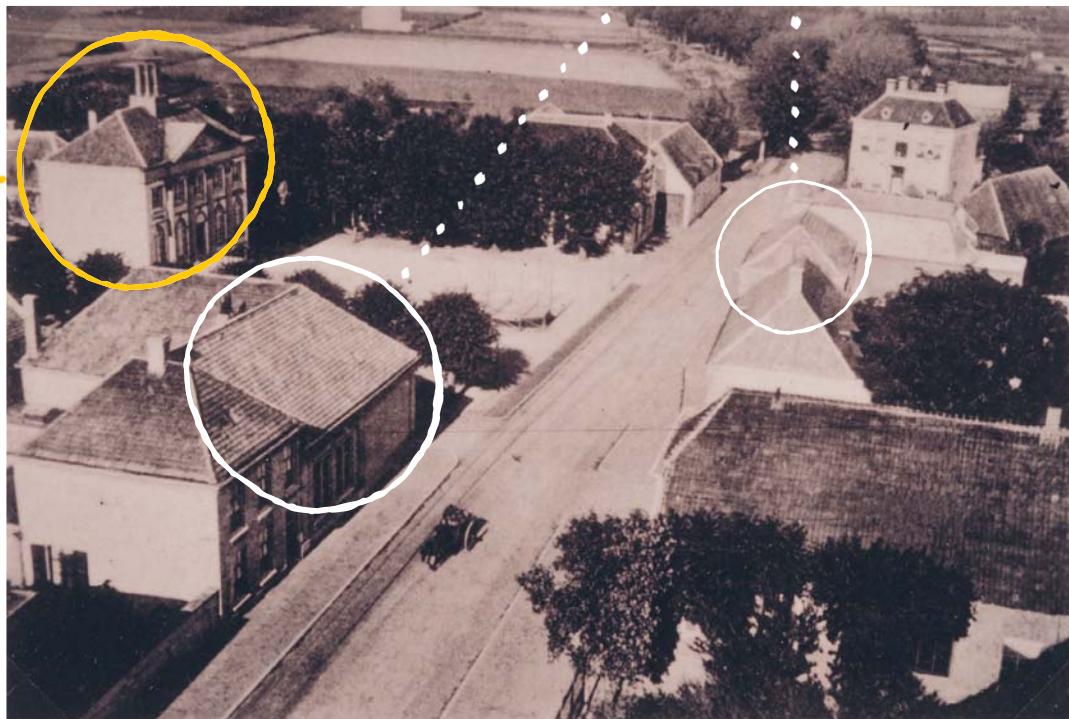


## The school

The primary school was opposite the **Van Goghs' house**. That was where Vincent and his brothers and sisters learned to read, write and do sums. Much later, after Vincent had become famous, his schoolmates told people that he had just been an ordinary boy – not the kind of person you thought

would be a famous painter one day. He would rather read a book than play with other children in the playground. He was often quiet. Hardly anyone remembered Vincent being good at drawing. Sadly, none of the drawings he did as a child has survived.

Here you can see the school and here is the Van Gogh family's house.





# ZEVENBERGEN AND 1864-1866

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## Boarding school and host family

When Vincent was eleven, he went to a school for respectable 'young gentlemen and young ladies' in Zevenbergen. That was twenty-five kilometres away: half an hour in a car these days, but more than two hours in his father's carriage. It was a boarding school, where children also had to live. They only went home during the school holidays. Vincent's parents took him to the school. When they said goodbye and drove away down the street, Vincent felt terribly lonely. He was very homesick in Zevenbergen. He said later that he had learned nothing there.



It is hard to see him, but this is Vincent, with a cap on his knees. The schoolteachers all wore hats.