

AP[®] ART HISTORY

2008 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 4

Left slide: Vincent Van Gogh, *The Plain at Auvers*, 1890.

Right slide: Blank

4. Attribute the painting to an artist you have studied. Justify your attribution by identifying and discussing specific characteristics seen in the painting. (10 minutes)

Background:

Attribution is a key art-historical term with which students should be familiar. Attribution is a fundamental component of connoisseurship and art history more generally, because it establishes the artist's individual corpus. In introductory college-level courses students are often given unknown works of art in order to evaluate their skills at attribution. This type of question assesses students' ability to closely observe and analyze a work of art, to recognize the stylistic characteristics specific to a particular artist, and to make an independent judgment based on art-historical knowledge. Through a process of deductive reasoning and analogy, students arrive at an attribution by comparing the unknown work to other artworks with which they are familiar. The best answers to this question do not simply identify the artist but present a full and persuasive case for the attribution based on specific stylistic characteristics and artistic content.

The Plain at Auvers (1890) was painted by Vincent Van Gogh (1853–1890), a leading Post-Impressionist artist. Van Gogh, who was largely self-taught, arrived in Paris in 1886, where he discovered Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism, and Japanese prints. Dreaming of establishing an artists' colony in the south of France, he moved to Arles in 1888. In Arles and later Saint-Rémy and Auvers, he explored the expressive properties of color and paint application, applying vibrant, often contrasting, colors using choppy, highly tactile brushstrokes. During his brief but intense career he painted more than 600 canvases, primarily landscapes. *The Plain at Auvers* is a typical example of his approach to landscape painting with its high horizon line, menacing sky, agitated brushwork, and saturated dabs of color. It is one of a series of panoramic landscapes he painted at Auvers-sur-Oise (May–July 1890). Although recognized by only a small coterie of artists and critics during his lifetime, Van Gogh has become one of the most popular and celebrated modern artists, whose works sell for stratospheric prices at auction. His art is discussed in all of the major survey texts, so students should be able to recognize his distinctive expressionistic style of painting.

Students have two tasks:

- (1) They must attribute the painting to Van Gogh.
- (2) They must justify their attribution by identifying and discussing specific characteristics in the painting.

Characteristics of Van Gogh's art that students might discuss to justify their attribution include the following:

- Use of pure, saturated color directly from the tube
- Expressionistic or symbolic use of color
- Presence of impasto (thick, textured paint application) with short, choppy strokes
- Swirling, expressionistic brushwork
- Objects outlined in darker hues
- Spatial effects influenced by Japanese prints

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Question 4 (continued)

Points to remember:

- This is an attribution question. Students should be able to recognize Van Gogh's distinctive style and technique based on their knowledge of late-nineteenth-century art.
- Students must justify their attribution by identifying and discussing specific characteristics of Van Gogh's art seen in the painting.
- This is a 10-minute question.

Scoring Criteria

Score Scale 0–4

- 4** Correctly attributes the painting to Van Gogh. Justifies the attribution by identifying and discussing specific characteristics seen in the painting. Discussion is full and contains no significant errors.
- 3** Correctly attributes the painting to Van Gogh. Seeks to justify the attribution by identifying and discussing specific characteristics seen in the painting. Presents a less persuasive case for the attribution than does a top-scoring essay. Discussion is not as full and may contain minor errors.
Note: Students cannot earn more than a 2 unless they attribute the painting to Van Gogh.
- 2** Attributes the painting to Van Gogh. Attempts to identify and discuss specific characteristics seen in the painting, but discussion is unfocused and may contain significant errors.
OR
Attributes the painting to another late-nineteenth-century artist and justifies the misattribution by relating specific characteristics seen in the painting to that artist. Presents a plausible case for the misattribution. Discussion may contain errors.
- 1** Attributes the painting to Van Gogh but fails to make a case for the attribution.
OR
Attributes the painting to another late-nineteenth-century artist. Makes an attempt to justify the misattribution, but discussion is weak and may contain significant errors.
- 0** Makes an attempt, but the response is without merit because it fails to make an attribution or makes only incorrect or irrelevant statements.
- Indicates a nonresponse, such as a blank paper, crossed-out words, or personal notes.

4. Attribute the painting to an artist you have studied. Justify your attribution by identifying and discussing specific characteristics seen in the painting. (10 minutes)

This is a piece by Vincent Van Gogh, the Dutch Impressionist. His work is characterized by thick choppy brushstrokes and vibrant energy. This sky is a good example of his typical brushstroke. Notice the blocks of ~~color~~ blue that fill the sky. The paint is uneven and thickly applied. The energy can be seen by the positioning of these "blocks." There are few long straight lines of the same color. Highlights abound in the fields and the clouds, giving the viewer the impression of what ~~Emotion~~ Emotion practically drips off the canvas. He put so much expression into his application of paint and the hasty, moment-like quality of the finished work conveys an overall ~~sense~~ sense of intense feelings.

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4. Attribute the painting to an artist you have studied. Justify your attribution by identifying and discussing specific characteristics seen in the painting. (10 minutes)

This painting can be attributed to the artist Van Gogh. The painting style is very similar to his. The rapid brush strokes and creation of "movement" throughout the piece is a characteristic of his. He also uses some color structuralism to give the illusion of different color theory to the viewers. It also appears as though the paint may be applied on very thick. This is also a characteristic of Van Gogh's painting style.

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4. Attribute the painting to an artist you have studied. Justify your attribution by identifying and discussing specific characteristics seen in the painting. (10 minutes)

This painting appears to be one of Van Gogh's wheat field paintings. You feel it is Van Gogh due to the brush strokes, use of color & location. The rolling clouds & the grass are those that only Van Gogh or someone heavily influenced by Van Gogh could accomplish.

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2008 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 4

Overview

This was an attribution question. Attribution involves ascribing works of art to particular artists, to art-historical periods, and, often, to places of origin. A kind of applied formal analysis, it is a basic tool of the art historian. (Note that the 2006 AP Exam included an attribution question that featured Vermeer.)

Sample: 4A

Score: 4

The essay correctly attributes the painting to Van Gogh and justifies the attribution by identifying and discussing characteristics of Post-Impressionist painting, such as “choppy brush strokes” and handling of color in large “blocks,” as well as “[h]ighlights.” The student acknowledges the use of color for expressive means (“Emotion practically drips off the canves [*sic*]”). The discussion is full and contains no significant errors.

Sample: 4B

Score: 3

The essay correctly attributes the painting to Van Gogh and supports the attribution by identifying and discussing elements that are characteristic of Van Gogh’s work: “rapid brush strokes,” thick application of paint, and “creation of ‘movement.’” The student begins to discuss the intentional handling of color, but this part of the essay is undeveloped. The discussion is less full than a response receiving a score of 4, and it contains minor errors.

Sample: 4C

Score: 2

The essay correctly attributes the painting to Van Gogh and attempts to justify the attribution by identifying key elements of Van Gogh’s works, such as “brush strokes, use of color,” and subject. Of these, the student only fully addresses landscape as an appropriate subject of Van Gogh’s art (“This painting appears to be one of Van Gogh’s wheat field paintings”). Discussion of the brushstrokes and color is less full and does not refer back to the painting shown in the slide. The essay is underdeveloped and unfocused.