

NORTON SIMON MUSEUM

ART-MAKING ACTIVITY: MAKE A SKETCHBOOK JOURNAL GRADES K-5

Objective

Learn how the artist Vincent van Gogh communicated with his friends and family by writing letters that recorded his feelings and his paintings. Then create a sketchbook journal to chronicle your days with writings and drawings for your future self.

Background

Vincent van Gogh (Dutch, 1853–1890) is known for paintings with bright colors and thick, energetic brushstrokes. Before becoming an artist, he tried many other jobs, working as an art dealer, teacher, bookseller and preacher, and he lived in many places. Wherever Van Gogh lived, he would write letters to his friends and family about his feelings and his art. He would often write letters to his younger brother Theo that included sketches of what he had seen. Theo encouraged his brother to focus on drawing, and he inspired Van Gogh to dedicate his life to becoming an artist. While living in the South of France, he painted his surrounding **landscape**, including a particular tree, “a yellow mulberry tree against a very blue sky.”

Discussion

- Look at the image of the *Mulberry Tree* on the activity page. Why do you think Van Gogh was so proud of this painting that he wrote to his brother and sister about it three times?
- Before cell phones and computers, people communicated by writing letters. Van Gogh shared his feelings in letters—when he felt sad, upset, inspired or happy. How do you share your feelings?

Vocabulary

- **Brushstrokes:** marks made by a brush moving paint across a surface.
- **Landscape:** a scene of nature, such as mountains, valleys, trees, rivers or forests.

Images of works referenced in this activity lesson

[The Mulberry Tree](#)

[Letter 824 from Van Gogh to Theo](#)

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Van Gogh resources from the Norton Simon

[Works by Van Gogh in the Collection](#)

[Highlights Curriculum Guide: *Portrait of a Peasant \(Patience Escalier\)*](#)

[Elements of Art Curriculum Guide: *The Mulberry Tree*](#)

Other resources on Van Gogh

[Van Gogh Museum](#)

[Unravel Van Gogh \(view details of Van Gogh's work\)](#)

[The Letters of Vincent Van Gogh](#)

Books

[Vincent's Colors](#)

[Meet the Artist: Vincent van Gogh](#)

[The Letters of Vincent Van Gogh](#)

Videos and activities

[Van Gogh Museum: Videos](#)

[Van Gogh Museum: Coloring Sheets, Projects, Games](#)

[Van Gogh Museum: Art Lessons](#)

[Tate: Quizzes and Art Activities](#)

Curriculum Connections

NATIONAL CORE ART STANDARDS

- Anchor Standard 1 — Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
- Anchor Standard 2 — Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
- Anchor Standard 3 — Refine and complete artistic work.

CALIFORNIA ART STANDARDS FOR VISUAL ARTS

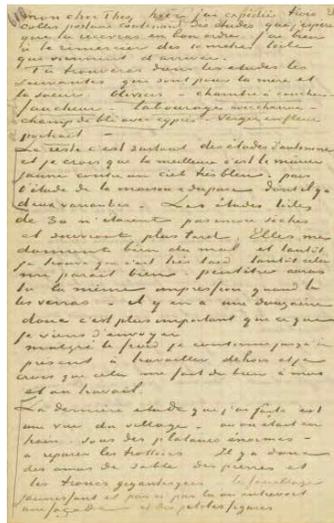
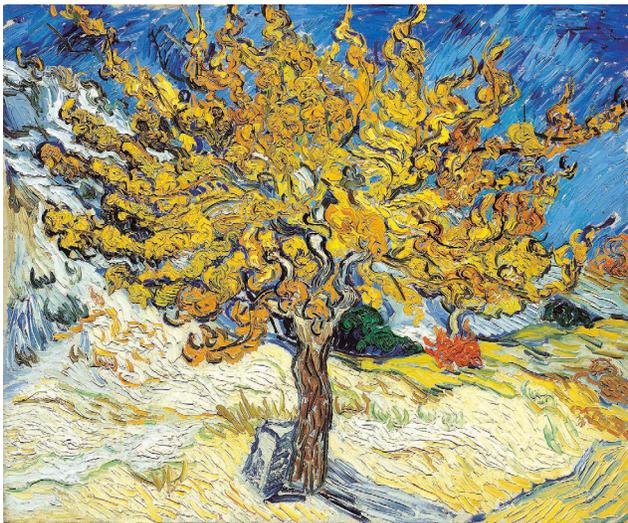
- K.VA: Cr2.1 — Through experimentation, build skills in various media and approaches to artmaking.
- K.VA: Cn11 — Identify a purpose of an artwork.
- 1.VA: Cr2.1 — Explore uses of materials and tools to create works of art or design.
- 3.VA: Cr2.1 — Create personally satisfying artwork using a variety of artistic processes and materials.

NORTON SIMON MUSEUM

MAKE A SKETCHBOOK JOURNAL FOR GRADES K-5

Van Gogh wrote hundreds of letters to his friends and family that talked about his emotions, beliefs and the paintings that he was working on. Many letters also included sketches. He wrote to his brother and sister three times about [The Mulberry Tree](#), a painting he was particularly proud of.

Make a sketchbook journal and chronicle your days with writings and sketches for your future self. Use the prompts at the end of these instructions to help you get started.



The Mulberry Tree, Vincent van Gogh (Dutch, 1853–1890), October 1889, oil on canvas, Norton Simon Art Foundation, Gift of Mr. Norton Simon; *Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh*, Saturday, 7 December 1889, pen and ink on paper, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

MATERIALS:

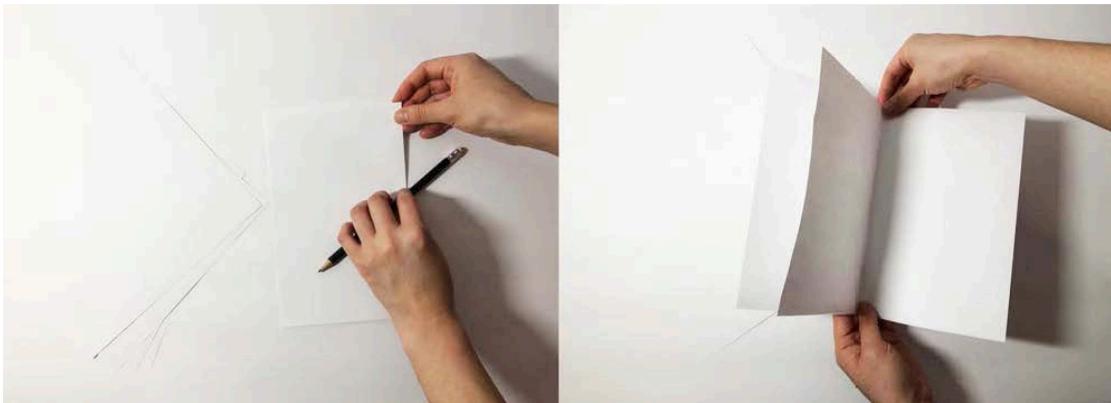


- **Cardstock or thick paper**
(1 sheet of 9 in. x 12 in.
trimmed to a 8½ in. x 11½ in.)
- **White paper**
(3 pieces, 8½ in. x 11 in.)
- **Scissors**
- **Stickers**
- **Glue**
- **Tape**
- **Pencil**
- **Yarn** (17 in. long, double
the length of your paper
folded in half)

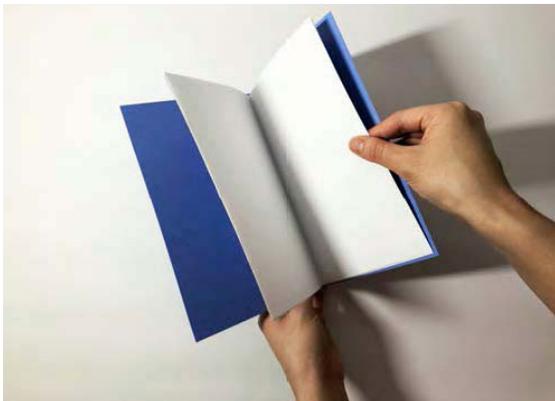
STEPS:



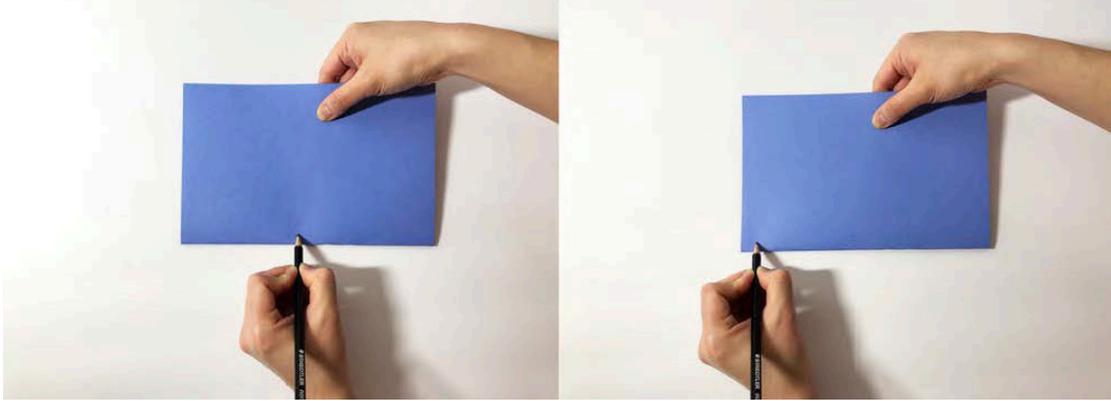
Fold your cardstock in half to make the cover of your sketchbook journal. You can use a pencil to sharpen the crease.



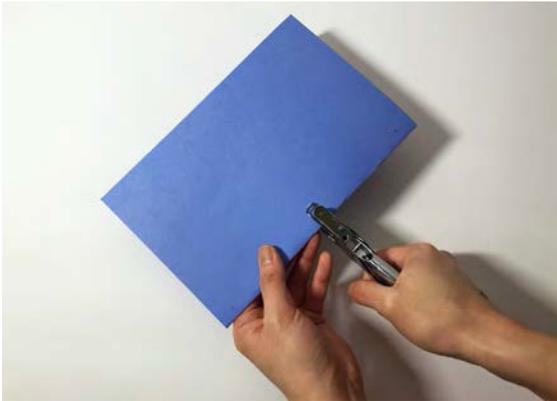
Fold your white pieces of paper in half, one at a time. Nest each folded piece into the other to make the pages of your sketchbook journal.



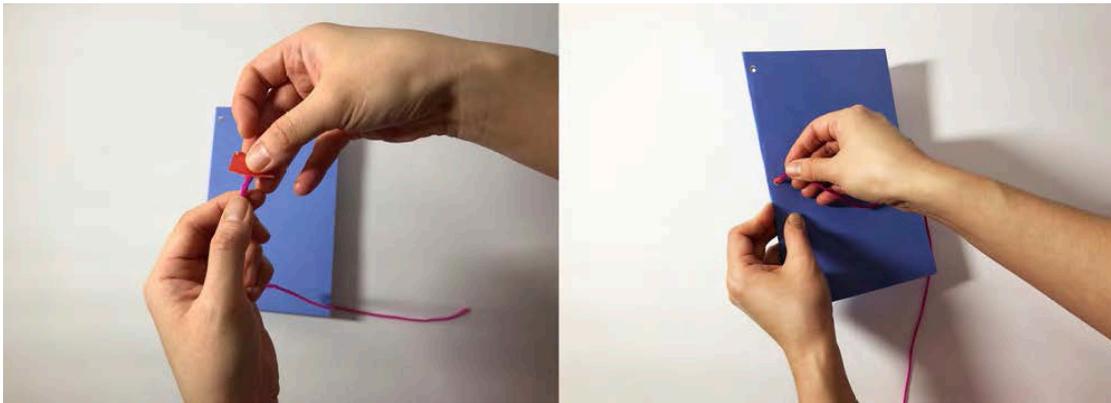
Unfold your cover and center your pages inside the cover.



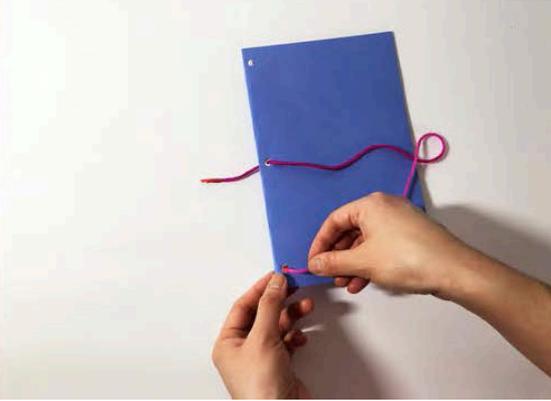
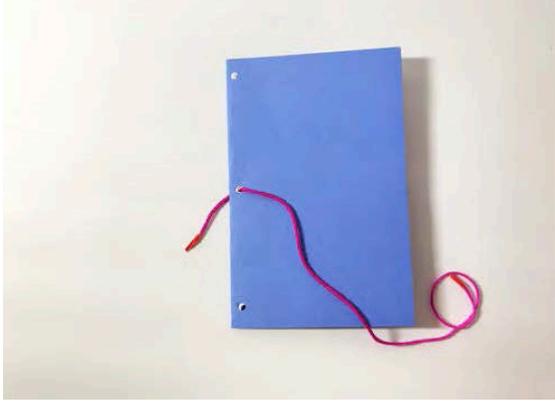
Close your cover and pages, and using a pencil, make a dot in the middle of the folded cover about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch from the folded edge (it doesn't have to be exact, but it shouldn't be right on the edge of the fold). Make a similar dot about $\frac{1}{2}$ an inch from the top, and one more dot about a $\frac{1}{2}$ an inch from the bottom.



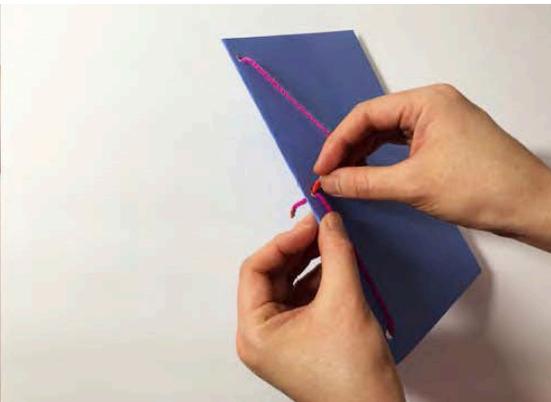
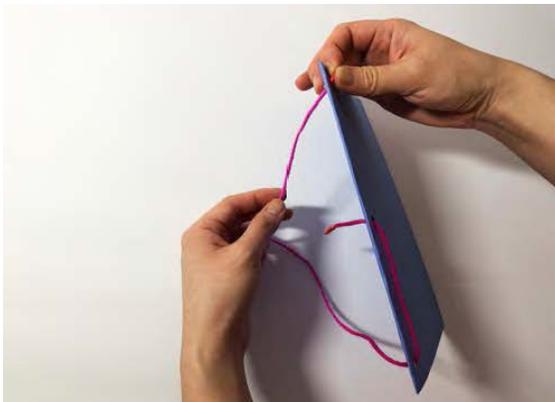
Using a hole puncher, punch a hole through the cover and pages where you marked with the dots (middle, top and bottom).



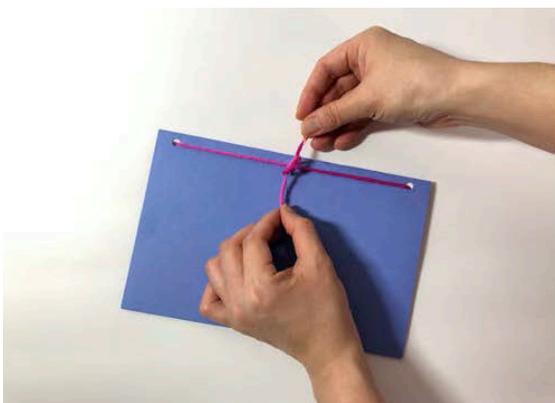
Wrap a piece of tape around the tip of one end of your yarn (so that the edge doesn't fray and it's easier to thread through the hole) and string the yarn through the middle hole leaving a few inches of string out.



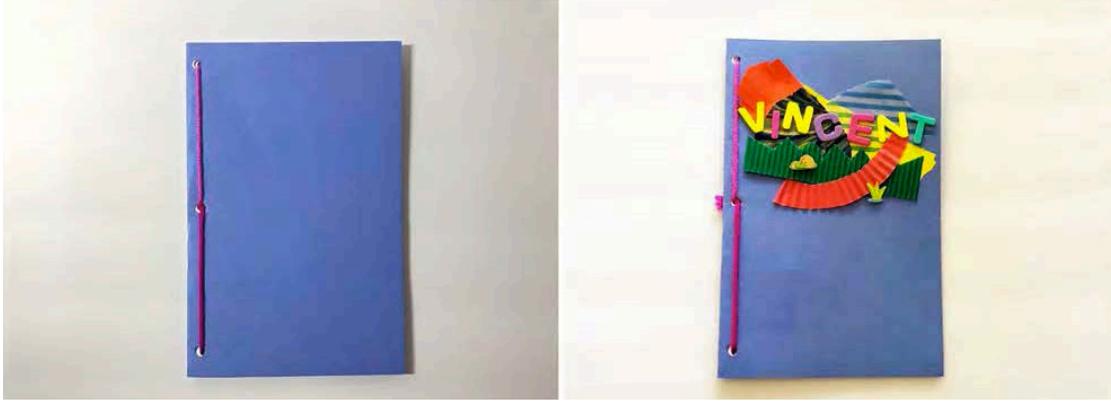
Take the taped end of yarn and string it through the bottom hole of the front cover.



Then string all the way through the top hole of the back cover, and string the yarn back through the middle hole.



Tie the two ends together, making sure the yarn is taut and make another knot.



Flip your sketchbook journal over and start personalizing your cover with collage, stickers and more!

**Below are prompts that can help you get started on your journal.
Write and/or sketch your thoughts.**

- What is the most memorable thing that happened today?
- What are you feeling right now?
- What is something that you are looking forward to?
- What makes you happy?
- What are some things that you are grateful for?
- Describe a person that inspires you and why.
- Describe a time when someone complimented you. How did it feel?
- Describe your favorite story.
- Describe a place that makes you feel happy and safe.
- Describe your perfect day. Be specific.
- Finish this sentence and keep going: I am...
- Finish this sentence and keep going: We are...
- Share some of these prompts with a friend and exchange thoughts as a way to better understand each other.