SYNOPSIS
Post-Impressionism is a catch-all term for the many and disparate reactions against the naturalism, and issues of light and color, which had inspired the Impressionists. Emerging around 1886, at the time of the Impressionist's eighth and last exhibition, and declining along with Fauvism in 1905, the movement embraces various trends, including the Neo-Impressionism of Seurat, and the Symbolism of Gauguin. The term 'Post-Impressionism' was devised by English critic Roger Fry, in 1910, for an exhibition in London which also included works by Manet, Cézanne, van Gogh, and many others.

KEY IDEAS / INFORMATION
- Symbolic and highly personal meanings were important to Post-Impressionists such as Gauguin and van Gogh. Rejecting the Impressionists' interest in the external, observed world, they instead looked inside themselves for content.
- As the Post-Impressionists turned away from describing effects of light and color, abstract form and pattern became increasingly important to them. Gauguin and van Gogh sought to create harmonious surface patterns, while Cézanne sought to introduce more structure, and a clearer sense of space and volume, to the Impressionists' fascination with natural light, by using color applied in regular, repetitive brushstrokes.
- Although the movement was predominantly French, it inspired similar developments throughout Europe. Painters such as Edvard Munch, Arnold Bocklin, James Ensor, Duncan Grant, Vanessa Bell, and London's Camden Town Group, were all important to its development, or were powerfully shaped by it.

BEGINNINGS
Post-Impressionism emerged out of the stylistic disagreements and personal animosities that eventually brought down Impressionism. Yet it was itself never a cohesive movement, and the label embraces a number of very different groups who all attempted to replace Impressionism as the leading avant-garde of the late nineteenth century. Indeed, many of its foremost figures were rivals in method and approach: Gauguin and
Seurat both detested one another and shared a low opinion of each other's styles; and while van Gogh revered the work of Degas and Rousseau, he was skeptical of Cézanne.

The artist who, perhaps more than any other, signaled the beginning of the new trend, was Georges Seurat. His Pointillism (or Divisionism, or Neo-Impressionism, as it is variously called) sought a new, scientific approach to color. But other artists, such as Gauguin, van Gogh, and Cézanne, would soon prove equally important, and they all differed greatly.

Paris was unquestionably the fount of the movement, and artists from Britain, America, the Netherlands, and elsewhere, flocked there in the hopes of absorbing the city's rich culture and joining its artistic elite. However, the emphasis on symbolic and expressive content in Post-Impressionism meant that the life of the city, considered as a subject for art, was no longer the draw it had been to the previous generation, and many painters matured elsewhere. Cézanne spent most of his career in Provence; van Gogh led a peripatetic existence, touching down in France, Belgium and Holland; and, in what is by far the most famous renunciation of Paris, Gauguin settled in Tahiti.

CONCEPTS AND STYLES
Despite the myriad approaches and ideologies associated with Post-Impressionists, they were united by their desire to overturn the superficiality of Impressionism. They felt that the Impressionists had allowed their preoccupations with technique, and the effects of natural light, to overshadow the importance of subject matter. But their impulses led them to solve this problem in different ways. Some, like Cézanne, sought greater pictorial structure, and they placed great emphasis on the specific context of a particular landscape or still life. Others, like Gauguin, sought a deeper engagement with expressive and symbolic content: they created paintings "de tete" (from memory or imagination), and they expressed a strong connection with the subject matter that inspired the work, whether it derived from religion, literature or mythology. These artists - Symbolists, or Synthetists - also placed greater emphasis on harmonious surface design: Gauguin was one of the first artists to refer to his work as "abstract."

In the fall of 1888, van Gogh and Gauguin shared a small apartment and studio space (famously known as The Yellow House), in Arles, in the south of France, and in the process forged a rocky, but mutually beneficial, relationship. They experimented with new approaches to painting, rejecting academic approaches to realistic depiction and fine finish, as well as the Impressionist's fixation with light and color. Instead they worked with thickly applied paint in saturated hues, to create rich surface patterns.

Although most of the Post-Impressionists were drawn to symbolic and expressive content, some, such as Paul Signac and Georges Seurat, extended the impressionists' interests in color theory. Known as Pointillists and Neo-Impressionists, they applied color in dense fields of tiny dots in order to mimic the vivid and vibrating appearance of natural light.

Many of the Post-Impressionists were drawn to primitivism in their search for more vivid styles and symbolic content. Among them, Henri Rousseau was championed as a pioneer: completely self-taught, his highly imaginative landscapes and jungle scenes, such as The Sleeping Gypsy (1897), and The Dream (1910), proved highly influential, inspiring the Fauves, Cubists, and Surrealists. Rousseau's paintings were modern not so
much due to their subject matter, but because of the artist's approach to abstract form and surface pattern, and the fact that he painted almost entirely from imagination.

**LATER DEVELOPMENTS**

One of the most important Post-Impressionists - and arguably the one who bridged the gap between Impressionism and various early twentieth century styles - was Paul Cézanne. Matisse and Picasso both reportedly referred to him as "the father of us all." His late work is characterized by abstract exercises in the articulation of space and volume through color. Rather than describe the overall impression of a scene, Cézanne sought to articulate its underlying structure, often in ways which suggest that the landscape is built up from the simplest geometric components. As he once famously wrote in a letter to the Symbolist painter Emile Bernard, "Treat nature in terms of the cylinder, the sphere, the cone, all in perspective."

It was not until 1910 that the term "Post-Impressionism" was coined, when English artist and critic Roger Fry organized an exhibition for London's Grafton Galleries, entitled "Manet and the Post-Impressionists." The exhibition was dominated by van Gogh, Cézanne, and particularly Gauguin, and also included works by the Fauves. Manet was a lesser presence: although today he is generally associated with the Impressionists, Fry felt that he was early in his rejection of that group's naturalism. Fry acknowledged in the catalogue that the label, Post-Impressionism, embraced many styles - at one stage he had even considered referring to the group as 'expressionists' - and its lack of precision points to disparity in the styles and interests of the artists it encompassed.

**Key Artists:**

Paul Cézanne was an influential French Post-Impressionist painter whose depictions of the natural world, based on internal geometric planes, paved the way for Cubism and later modern art movements.

Vincent van Gogh was a Dutch painter, commonly associated with the Post-Impressionist period. As one of the most prolific and experimental artists of his time, van Gogh was a spontaneous painter and a master of color and perspective. Troubled by personal demons all his life, many historians speculate that van Gogh suffered from a bipolar disorder.

Paul Gauguin was a French Post-Impressionist artist who employed color fields and painterly strokes in his work. He is best known for his primitivist depictions of native life in Tahiti and Polynesia.

Georges-Pierre Seurat was a French painter who gave rise to the Post- and Neo-Impressionist artistic styles of the late 19th century. Seurat's greatest contribution to
modern art was his development of Pointillism, a style of painting in which small dots of paint were applied to create a cohesive image. Combining the science of optics with painterly emotion, Pointillism evoked a visual harmony never before seen in modern art.

Edouard Vuillard was a French Post-Impressionist painter especially known for his interiors and domestic scenes. A member of the Les Nabis group, his works are characterized by rough areas of color, pointillist daubs and dots, and decorative patterns that spread out across background fabrics and wallpaper.

The French artist Pierre Bonnard, although dismissed as old-fashioned by some of the avant-garde in his lifetime, was esteemed by contemporary colorists like Matisse. A member of the Nabis group in his youth, his innovative paintings play with light, decorative surfaces, and Impressionist techniques.

Henri Rousseau was a French self-taught painter. His most famous works, done in his characteristic flat figurative style, show surreal and dream-like scenes in primitive or natural settings.

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec was a Post-Impressionist artist who depicted the dancers, prostitutes, drinkers, and other characters of fin-de-siecle Paris. He is known for his paintings, his caricatures of friends, and his well-designed posters for Parisian dance halls.

Works of Art:

**Title:** Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte (1884-86)
**Artist:** Georges Seurat
**Artwork Description & Analysis:** Seurat’s *Sunday Afternoon* is perhaps the most famous example of the painting technique known as Pointillism. Although the picture contains clear lines and impressionistic elements of light and shadow, the entire scene is composed of a series of small, precise dots of color. If viewed closely, the painting becomes nothing more than a quasi-abstract mesh of colors, similar to a needle-point. When viewed at an appropriate distance, however, *Sunday Afternoon* comes into focus, thus achieving Seurat’s desired optical effect. However groundbreaking this and similar works were, other Post-Impressionists like Gauguin considered pointillism too rational and scientific to be considered avant-garde.

Oil on canvas - The Art Institute of Chicago

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Title: Portrait of Doctor Gachet (1890)

Artist: Vincent van Gogh

Artwork Description & Analysis: Van Gogh was one of the modern era’s most gifted and emotionally-troubled artists. Grossly underappreciated in his lifetime - due in large part to his volatile nature and mental illness (which many now believe was a bi-polar disorder) - van Gogh was an impulsive and often spontaneous painter. Much in the tradition of Delacroix, in Portrait of Doctor Gachet van Gogh strives to achieve what he believed all great portraits should - a complex mixture of emotions, as opposed to a naturalistic depiction. Conveying elements of strength, intelligence and melancholy, van Gogh also derived painterly rhythms from the arrangement of the figure in relation to the backdrop.

Oil on canvas - Private collection

Title: The Bathers (1898-1905)

Artist: Paul Cézanne

Artwork Description & Analysis: Cézanne’s The Bathers is considered by many to be his defining masterpiece. Much like his landscapes and still lifes, Cézanne employed the technique of constructing visually complex scenery composed of simple shapes, lines and geometric forms. This attention to structure and volume - for which Cézanne became famous late in life - was in part an effort to avoid painting in any traditional representational style. Nevertheless, the scene sits comfortably within the highly traditional French tradition of classical landscape, which stretches back to Nicolas Poussin.

Oil on canvas - Philadelphia Museum of Art