**Vincent van Gogh** (1853-1890) was born more than 150 years ago in the Netherlands. He had many jobs, such as a teacher and working in a book store and an art gallery. In 1880, his brother convinced him to paint full time. When painting, Van Gogh often used dark colors and used loose brush strokes. In 1885 Van Gogh went to Belgium where he saw art from Japan which used bright colors. This art influenced his style. In 1886 he moved to Paris and discovered a style called impressionism. Van Gogh is regarded as a post-impressionist. He was known for cutting off part of his left ear and giving it to a woman. In 1889 he entered a mental institution. While there he began painting in thick striped and swirly patterns. This was where he created his famous masterpiece, The Starry Night, which interestingly, has all the stars in the correct spot in the sky. In 1890, Van Gogh died. He was 37 years old. During his life, he created over 2000 paintings and drawings, but sold only one.

**Rosa Parks** is known as “The Mother of the Modern Day Civil Rights Movement.” Rosa Parks was an African-American woman who refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white passenger. She was arrested for breaking segregation laws, and her arrest began a boycott of city buses that lasted 381 days. This led to the Supreme Court ruling in 1956 making segregation illegal on public buses. Her brave act would inspire many others to take a stand against unfair segregation laws. Rosa Parks was born in Alabama and grew up on a small farm. She attended a school for African-American children that was open only five months a year and went up to sixth grade. She married a civil rights activist named Raymond Parks. With her husband’s support, Rosa graduated from high school in 1934. Together, they worked for the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). Rosa Parks continued the fight for equal rights her whole life.

**Annie Oakley** was a legend of the American West, known for her dazzling talent with a gun. Annie suffered a very difficult childhood. Her father died when she was six, and she never went to school. Her family was very poor. She began learning shooting tricks at age nine to help earn money. At 16 she was well known for her incredible shooting feats. She married Frank E. Butler, a top shooter and performer. As a couple, they became one of the top acts in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show. Annie could hit the edge of a playing card from 30 yards and shoot distant targets backwards, while looking into a mirror. She could hit a target while standing on a galloping horse that most men couldn’t hit standing still. Annie overcame poverty, mistreatment and physical injury. She used her talent to break down barriers for women in her sport. Annie showed generosity and compassion to young women in need, widows and orphans. Her death, at the age of 66, saddened many throughout America.

**Ludwig Van Beethoven** was one of the greatest classical music composers of all time. His accomplishments were even more astonishing because he was deaf for much of his life. Beethoven was born in Bonn, Germany. His father, who was also a musician, could be demanding and harsh with Beethoven. He often dragged his son out of bed to practice the piano. By the age of 13 Beethoven was already performing for money. When he was 18 years old his mother died, and he had to take charge of his family. When Beethoven was 29 he discovered that he was going deaf. Because of this, he developed a new musical style that reflected his violent emotions. Around this time Beethoven composed the Fifth Symphony, one of the most influential and popular of all his compositions. By 1820 he was so deaf that he could only communicate through writing. Even though he couldn’t hear, this was his most creative period. During this time, he wrote his greatest works: the last five piano sonatas, the Mass in D, the Ninth Symphony, and the last five string quartets. Beethoven died on March 26, 1827 at the age of 57.