



Gwen John

Painter

Born: 22 June 1876

Died: 18 September 1939

ARTY FACT!

When Gwen and Augustus first arrived in London, they lived on a diet of fruit and nuts because they were so poor.

Gwen John's life

Gwen John was born in Wales. Her younger brother, Augustus, also became an artist. Their mother encouraged the children to draw, though she died when the children were very young, Gwen continued to draw on scraps of paper.

When he was 17, Augustus went to the Slade school of Art, in London. Gwen joined him there the following year. At the time, the Slade was the only art school in Britain where women could study.

Augustus was very talented and outgoing and was soon making lots of friends. Gwen was much more shy. Their painting styles reflected their different personalities – his paintings were bold with confident, expressive brush strokes, hers were carefully drawn and sensitive. She travelled to Paris, where she continued her studies, and developed her own style.

What makes Gwen John special?

During her lifetime, Gwen John saw her brother achieve great success as an artist. Her work was largely ignored.

She was often very poor and her health suffered.

Gwen lived alone in France for the rest of her life. In 1913 she became a Catholic and she often talked about painting being like worshipping God. She had always taken a long time to complete each painting and as she grew older she painted less and less.

Today Gwen John's paintings hang in galleries around the world. Many people think she is a far greater painter than her brother. Her paintings seem quiet and mysterious and perhaps a little sad. The people in the paintings are lost in their thoughts.

WHAT CAN YOU SEE?

Can you find the painting of the woman in a red shawl by Gwen John?

What do you think the woman in the picture is thinking about?

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Gwen John mixed chalk dust into her paint, which made it drier and paler.

Try mixing powdered chalk into ready mixed paint.

What does it feel like to paint with?