Paul Cézanne was a French painter who can be said to form the bridge between late 19th century Impressionism and the early 20th century’s most startling new line of artistic enquiry, namely Cubism.

Paul Cézanne was a French artist, a painter (Post-impressionist) whose work laid the foundations of the transition from the 19th century conception of artistic endeavour to a new and radically different world of art in the 20th. The quotation attributed to both Matisse and Picasso that Cézanne ‘...is the father of us all...’ cannot be easily refuted.

Cézanne’s work demonstrates a mastery of design, colour, composition and draughtsmanship. His often repetitive, sensitive, tentative, delicate and exploratory brushstrokes are highly characteristic and instantly recognisable, almost as clearly recognisable as handwriting.

Using planes of colour and small repeated brush-strokes that build up to form complex fields at once a direct expression of the sensations of the observing eye, and an abstraction from observed nature, Cézanne’s paintings convey intense study of his subjects, a repeated and searching gaze, and a dogged struggle to deal with the complexity of human visual perception.

Paul was born in Aix-en-Provence, one of the Southern-most regions of France, on January 19, 1839, the son of Louis-Auguste Cézanne, a self-made man who was the local banker.

Provence is a varied and complex region geographically, comprising several limestone plateaux and mountain ranges to the East of the Rhone valley. The climate is hot and dry in summer, and quite cool in winter. Altitudes range from lower lying areas to some quite impressive mountain peaks, and these more mountainous areas have characteristic pine forests and limestone outcrops.
It is a place where the fragrance of thyme and lavender hangs on the air on summer evenings below the immovable mass of Mont Sainte-Victoire. Cézanne clearly absorbed his surroundings wholeheartedly, and developed a lifelong love for the Provençal landscapes which later became his chief subjects of study.

From 1859 to 1861 Cézanne studied law in Aix, and developed his early love of art by taking drawing lessons. Going against the objections of his father, he committed himself to pursuing his artistic development and left Aix for Paris with his close friend Émile Zola in 1861.

Cézanne and Zola disagreed, and never reconciled, over Zola's fictionalized depiction of Cézanne in the novel *L'Œuvre* (*The Masterpiece*, 1886). In this,
Zola recalled their endless explorations of the countryside, when they spend long summer days bathing naked in the River Arc. They always took ‘five or six books, just enough to last them’.

In Paris, Cézanne met Pissarro and the other Impressionists. Pissarro was to influence Cézanne’s painting over the years and they often painted together outside Paris at Auvers. Paris was not ready for the ‘wild man’ (as Roger Fry described Cézanne) and the thin-skinned provincial was not yet ready to take on the world. It took Pissarro to recognise his promise and it took long, lonely years in self-imposed exile in Provence to bring his art to maturity.

Eventually, his father reconciled to his son’s choice of career and supported him in this. Cézanne later received a large inheritance from his father, on which he could continue living a comfortable life.
Vase of flowers (1876)

Leda with swan (c1880-82)
and comprises many paintings of groups of large, heavy figures in the landscape, imaginatively painted. Later in his career he became more interested in working from direct observation and gradually developed a light, airy painting that was to influence the impressionists enormously.

In Cézanne's work we see a development of a solidified, almost architectural style of painting, in which the visual field is broken down into small, often very regular brushstrokes that build up the image in planes and areas of colour. To the building of his canvases and the relationships between shapes and colours, he brought the same cautious tenacity with which his father had built the family fortune.

His famous words, ‘I want to make of Impressionism something solid and
lasting like the art in the museums’, seem to indicate that his struggle was to develop a hitherto unknown authenticity of observation of the seen world by the most accurate method of representing it in paint that he could find, and this, for him, involved breaking the surface of the painting into small, often repetitive strokes of the brush.

He structurally ordered whatever he perceived into simple forms and colour planes to provide the maximum amount of information in the image of his observed subject. To the palette of the Impressionists, with their new colours, he brought the solidity and weight he perceived in the forms of his native landscape and the objects around him.

Cézanne’s geometric essentialisation of forms was to influence Pablo Picasso’s, Georges Braque’s, and Juan Gris’ Cubism in profound ways. When one examines closely the Cubist paintings together with Cézanne’s late work, it is immediately clear that a direct link exists between his work and the later discoveries of Cubism. The key to this link is the depth and concentration that Cézanne ap-
We have two eyes, and therefore are possessed of binocular vision. This gives rise to two separate views of the world, which are simultaneously processed in the visual cortex of the brain, and provide us with depth perception, and a complex knowledge of the space which we inhabit. Try for a moment staying still and closing one eye, then closing the other and opening the first. This gives a good illustration of the idea.

It is difficult to perceive depth with only one eye, and we have to rely on another perceptual sense, the sense that distant objects appear smaller than close objects. This becomes unreliable when we do not know what an object is, and therefore cannot guess the sort of size it should be.

The essential aspect of binocular vision that Cézanne employed and became influential on Cubism was that we often ‘see’ two views of an object at the same time. This led him to paint with a varying outline that at once shows the left-eye view and the right-eye view. Cubism took this a step further and Picasso, Braque and Gris experimented with not simply two simultaneous views, but with multiple views of the same subject.

Cézanne's paintings were shown in the first exhibition of the Salon des Refusés in 1863, which displayed works not accepted by the jury of the official Paris Salon. The Paris Salon rejected Cézanne's submissions every year from 1864 to 1869. It was in the latter year that he be-
gan an affair with Hortense Fiquet; his son was born in 1872.

He featured in Impressionist exhibitions in 1874 and 1877, returning to Paris in the latter year. In 1886, his father died leaving Paul to inherit the family wealth. He featured in a retrospective at the Salon d’Automne in 1904.

Cézanne exhibited little in his lifetime and worked in increasing artistic isolation, remaining in the South of France, in his beloved Provence, far from Paris. He concentrated on a few subjects: still lifes, studies of bathers, and especially the

Mont Sainte-Victoire, of which he painted many times.

Although religious images appeared less frequently in Cezanne’s later work, he remained a devout Catholic, and said: ‘When I judge art, I take my painting
and put it next to a God-made object like a tree or flower. If it clashes, it is not art.’

In 1906, Cézanne collapsed while painting outdoors during a thunderstorm. One week later, on October 22, he died of pneumonia at Aix-en-Provence.

His paintings of 1865-70 form what is usually called his early ‘romantic’ period. Extremely personal in character, it deals with bizarre subjects of violence and fantasy in harsh, sombre colours and extremely heavy paintwork.

Thereafter, as Cézanne rejected that kind of approach and worked his way out of the obsessions underlying it, his art is conveniently divided into three phases. In the early 1870s, through a mutually helpful association with Pissarro, he assimilated the principles of colour and lighting of Impressionism and loosened up his brushwork; yet he retained his own
sense of mass and the interaction of planes, as in *House of the Hanged Man* (1873).

In the late 1870s Cézanne entered the phase known as ‘constructive’, characterized by the grouping of parallel, hatched brushstrokes in formations that build up a sense of mass in themselves. He continued in this style until the early 1890s, when, in his series of paintings titled *Card Players* (1890-92), the upward curvature of the players’ backs creates a sense of architectural solidity and thrust, and the intervals between figures and objects have the appearance of live cells of space and atmosphere.

Finally, living as a solitary in Aix rather than alternating between the south and Paris, Cézanne moved into his late phase. Now he concentrated on a few basic subjects: still lifes of studio objects built around such recurring elements as apples, statuary, and tablecloths; studies of bathers, based upon the male model and drawing upon a combination of memory, earlier studies, and sources in the art of the past; and successive views of the Mont Sainte-Victoire, a nearby landmark, painted from his studio looking across the intervening valley.

The landscapes of the final years, much affected by Cézanne’s contemporar-
Château at Médan (c1880). This was Zola’s summer residence.

Hortense Fiquet. She lived as his mistress for 17 years before they married.

Girl at the piano (1869-71). This may be his younger sister, Marie, in the family drawing room.