

UNIT NINETEEN:

Taking Care of Yourself: Writing Your Autobiography *Suggestions for the Instructor*

Pg. 19-4 - 19-5 - Describing Yourself and Others

Distribute the handout, **Describing Yourself and Others**. Review it with the students. Do a few activities to help students become acquainted with new words on the list. For example, you might:

- ask volunteers to take turns reading sections or columns from the list aloud
- ask students to circle all the words they know and use in their daily speech and highlight all the words they'd like to know
- assign small groups to a column of words (or a short set of words) and ask them to find the definitions by using dictionaries and thesauruses and then share their definitions with the class
- ask students to write short stories using a selected set of words

Tell students they will be drawing on these lists to help them write Biography Poems and Autobiography Poems.

Pg. 19-6 - Frederick Douglass Biography Poem

Write the following quote on the board:

"When students become aware of the power of their past, they will have a far greater understanding and appreciation for the power within themselves to accomplish whatever they set their sights on." -- Baruti K. Kafele

Ask students to read the quote and think about what the speaker means. Is it important to understand our collective history? Is it valuable to know about the past – the past of a group of people and the past of an individual? How is it useful?

Distribute "Learning to Read and Write" by Frederick Douglass (Unit Nine, Pg. 9-20 – 9-23.) "Learning to Read and Write" from **Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass** describes the famous abolitionist's experience learning to read and the power he associated with literacy. (The complete autobiography is available on-line at www.gutenberg.org/files/23/23-h/23-h.htm.)

Remind the students that Frederick Douglass had a powerful impact on our history because he worked so hard to create change, to interrupt the status quo, the way the people in power thought it was always going to be, by writing, by fighting, by living a courageous life.

Distribute **Frederick Douglass Biography Poem**. Have student volunteers read it aloud twice. Ask students if they recognize any of the words about Frederick Douglass's life based on the excerpt from his Narrative. As if they feel the poem describes him accurately.

Pg. 19-7 - Biography Poem

Distribute **Biography Poem**. Tell students this poem follows the model of the poem about Frederick Douglass.

Place a stack of African-American history cards or one page biographies of famous African-Americans at each table. (This exercise can be done with biographies of any influential Americans about whom you have read as a class, or about whom you have one page informational handouts.)

A number of free, printable resources are available on line. For example:
<https://www.education.com/worksheets/black-history-month/>

Ask students to work in pairs to read the card or handout aloud to each other, then to use the **Describing Yourself and Others** handout (and any other resources or word lists) to find words to include in the poem.

Tell them they need to use all of the bulleted lines on top and bottom of the page and to complete as many of the prompts as they can, but to skip prompts that don't apply to the person they have researched.

Ask them to share their poems with the class. Tell students that it is important to know and reflect on their own personal histories as well as the history of their people, their race, their culture, their gender, etc.

Pg. 19-8 – Autobiography Poem

Distribute **Autobiography Poem** and ask students to take time completing it, using **Describing Yourself and Others** handout (and any other resources or word lists) to find words to include in the poem.

Tell them they need to use all of the bulleted lines on top and bottom of the page and to complete as many of the prompts as they can, but to skip prompts that don't apply to them.

Ask them to share their poems with the class.

Pg. 19-9 – 19-34 – Autobiography Packet

Distribute the Autobiography Packet and use it to guide students in the writing of an autobiography. You may choose to set aside time during every class period for students to write reflectively about their lives, using the prompts as a guide; you may also ask students to write chapters of their autobiographies on their own time.

Encourage students to use the Autobiography Packet to develop their writing skills. Have them use the “Describing Yourself and Others” handout to enhance their vocabulary. Have them share their reflections with others and ask for feedback. Have them edit, revise and type their autobiographies for publication.

Throughout the process, ask students to reflect on the following questions:

1. Why is it important to understanding our personal history?
2. Can knowing -- and writing about -- our personal history help us feel empowered? How? Why?
3. How can knowing -- and writing about -- our personal history help us see the future in a new way?
4. Why is it sometimes difficult to probe the past?
5. Are there some memories that are easy and some that are difficult to uncover?
6. What surprises you about reflecting on your past and writing about your memories?
7. What do you think it will be like to read your autobiography five years from now? Twenty years from now?
8. Would it be useful to share your autobiography with others in your family? With your children? Why?

DESCRIBING YOURSELF & OTHERS

What adjectives can you use to describe yourself or someone else? Be creative, be unique, be unusual!

Use descriptive words you do not usually use.

- agile
- agreeable
- alert
- amiable
- amazing
- ambitious
- amiable
- amusing
- analytical
- artistic
- assertive
- attentive
- attractive
- authentic
- awful
- balanced
- beautiful
- beneficent
- blue
- blunt
- boisterous
- brave
- bright
- brilliant
- buff
- callous
- candid
- capable
- careful
- careless
- caustic
- cautious
- charming
- childlike
- cheerful
- civil
- clean
- clever
- clumsy
- coherent
- competent
- composed
- conceited
- confident
- confused
- content
- cool
- cordial
- cowardly
- crabby
- crafty
- cranky
- critical
- cruel
- cute
- curious
- cynical
- dainty
- decisive
- delicate
- dependent
- delightful
- depressed
- devoted
- diligent
- direct
- discerning
- disruptive
- distant
- distraught
- distrustful
- dramatic
- dreary
- drowsy
- dutiful
- eager
- earnest
- easy-going
- efficient
- egotistical
- elegant
- emotional
- energetic
- excellent
- excitable
- fabulous
- fastidious
- ferocious
- fervent
- fiery
- flabby
- flashy
- frank
- friendly
- funny
- fussy
- generous
- gentle
- gloomy
- graceful
- grateful
- groggy
- grouchy
- guarded
- hearty
- helpful
- hesitant
- hysterical
- idle
- illogical
- immature
- immodest
- impatient
- impetuous
- impressive
- impulsive
- inactive
- incisive
- insensitive
- inspiring
- intelligent
- interesting
- intolerant
- inventive
- irritable
- irritating
- jocular
- jovial
- joyous
- keen
- kind
- lame
- lazy
- lean
- leery
- lethargic
- likable
- listless
- literate
- lithe
- lively
- logical
- lovable
- lovelorn

- lovely
- maternal
- mature
- mean
- mercurial
- meticulous
- mild
- miserable
- modest
- morose
- motivated
- musical
- naive
- natural
- naughty
- negative
- nervous
- noisy
- normal
- nosy
- numb
- obliging
- obnoxious
- one-sided
- orderly
- ordinary
- organized
- outgoing
- outspoken
- particular
- passionate
- passive
- paternal
- patient
- peaceful
- pensive
- picky
- playful
- pleasant
- plucky
- polite
- popular
- positive
- powerful
- practical
- prejudiced
- pretty
- proficient
- proud
- prudent
- punctual
- quick
- quiet
- ready
- realistic
- reassuring
- reclusive
- rejoicing
- relaxed
- reliable
- reluctant
- renewed
- resentful
- reserved
- resigned
- respected
- respectful
- rested
- restless
- revered
- ridiculous
- sad
- sassy
- saucy
- sedate
- sensible
- sensitive
- serene
- serious
- sharp
- shrewd
- shy
- silly
- sincere
- sleepy
- sloppy
- slothful
- slovenly
- slow
- smart
- snazzy
- somber
- sober
- soulful
- spirited
- spiteful
- stable
- staid
- steady
- stern
- striking
- strong
- stupid
- sturdy
- subtle
- sullen
- sulky
- superficial
- supportive
- surly
- suspicious
- sweet
- tactful
- tactless
- tasteful
- talented
- tender
- terrific
- terrified
- testy
- thinking
- thoughtful
- timid
- tired
- tolerant
- touchy
- tranquil
- tricky
- unafraid
- uncertain
- unfriendly
- unhelpful
- unique
- unpleasant
- unreliable
- unstable
- unsure
- unusual
- venerable
- versatile
- vigilant
- wacky
- wandering
- warm
- wary
- watchful
- weak
- weird
- wild
- willing
- wonderful
- wondering
- worried
- valuable
- versatile
- vulnerable
- yearning
- zealous

Frederick Douglass Biography Poem

Frederick Douglass

Writer, speaker, abolitionist

Brilliant, brave, forceful

Activist, orator, statesman

Who dreamed of liberty for all people

Who was determined to abolish slavery

Who refused to stop working for justice

Who taught us to stay strong and not give up

in the face of adversity

Who made a difference by telling his story

so that others would understand the horrors of slavery

Who said, "It is not light that we need, but fire;

it is not the gentle shower, but thunder.

We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake."

Who wrote Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave

Writer, speaker, abolitionist

Inspiring, wise, courageous

Frederick Douglass

Biography Poem

Fill in the blanks to write a poem about a person whose life you have researched. Skip prompts that don't apply to the person you have chosen. Then retype the poem and share it with the class.

(Name) _____

(What he or she is known for) _____

(Three adjectives that describe him or her) _____

(A synonym for what he or she is known for) _____

Who dreamed of _____

Who was determined to _____

Who refused to _____

Who invented _____

Who discovered _____

Who wrote _____

Who taught us _____

Who made a difference by _____

Who believed in _____

Who is remembered for _____

Who said, " _____ "

Who learned _____

(What he or she is known for) _____

(Three different adjectives that describe him or her) _____

(Name) _____

Autobiography Poem

*Fill in the blanks to write a poem about yourself. Skip prompts that don't apply to you.
Then retype the poem and share it with the class.*

(Your name) _____

(Three adjectives that describe you) _____

Son / daughter of _____

Mother / father of _____

Sister / brother _____

Maker of _____

Lover of _____

Fan of _____

I dream of _____

I'm determined to _____

I refuse to _____

I can make a difference by _____

I believe _____

I want to be remembered for _____

I am learning _____

(Three different adjectives that describe you) _____

(Your name) _____

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My Story

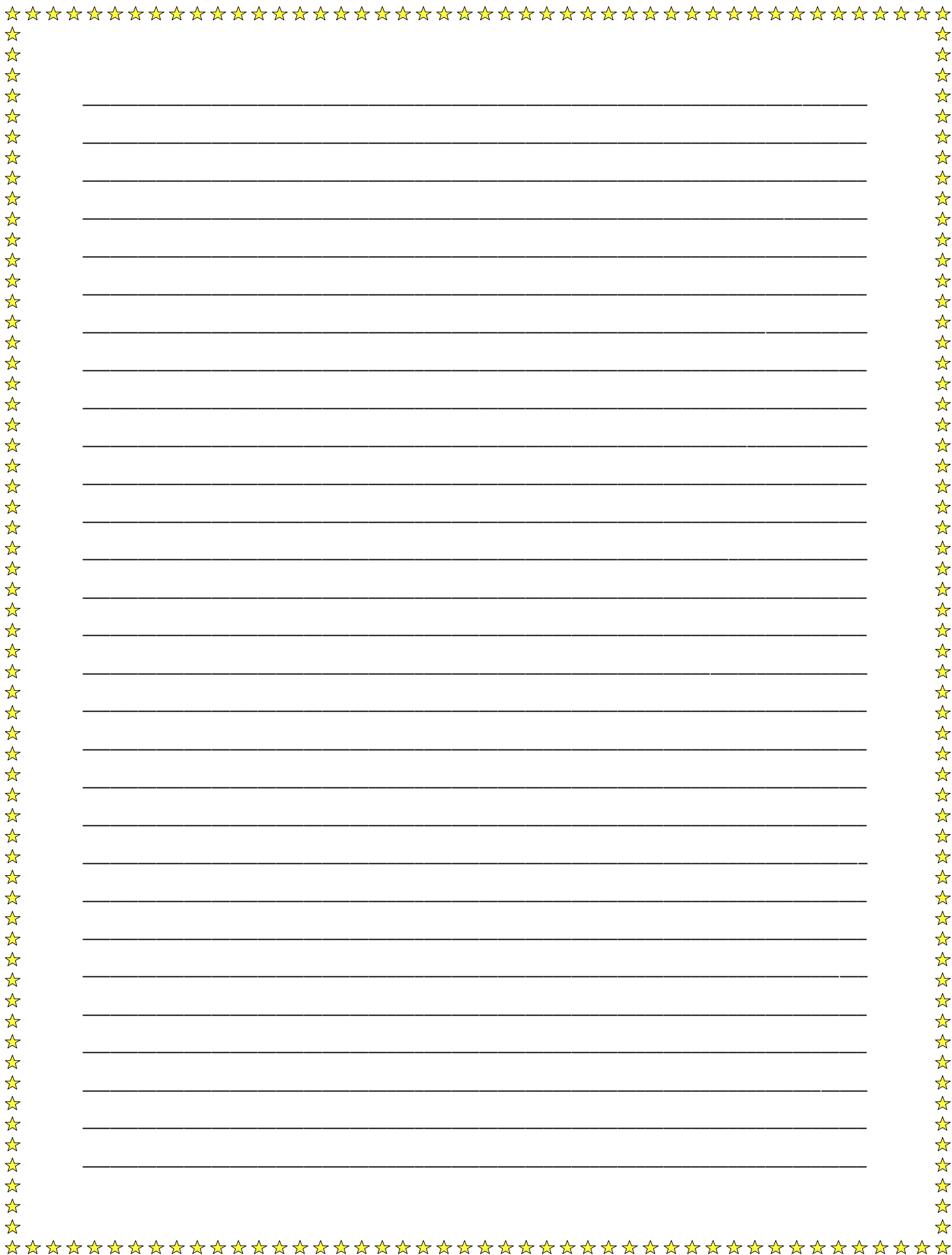
The Autobiography of

Date





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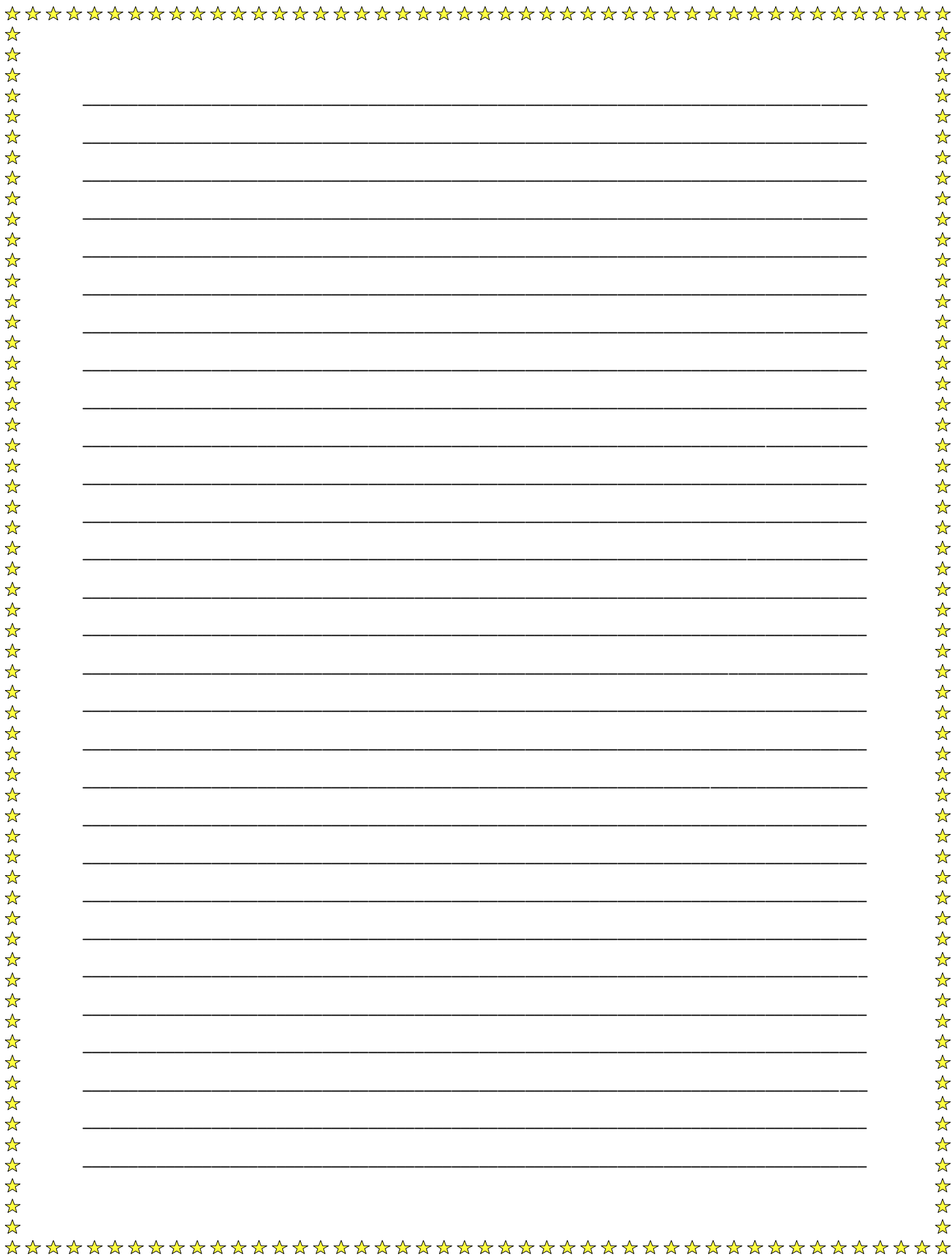
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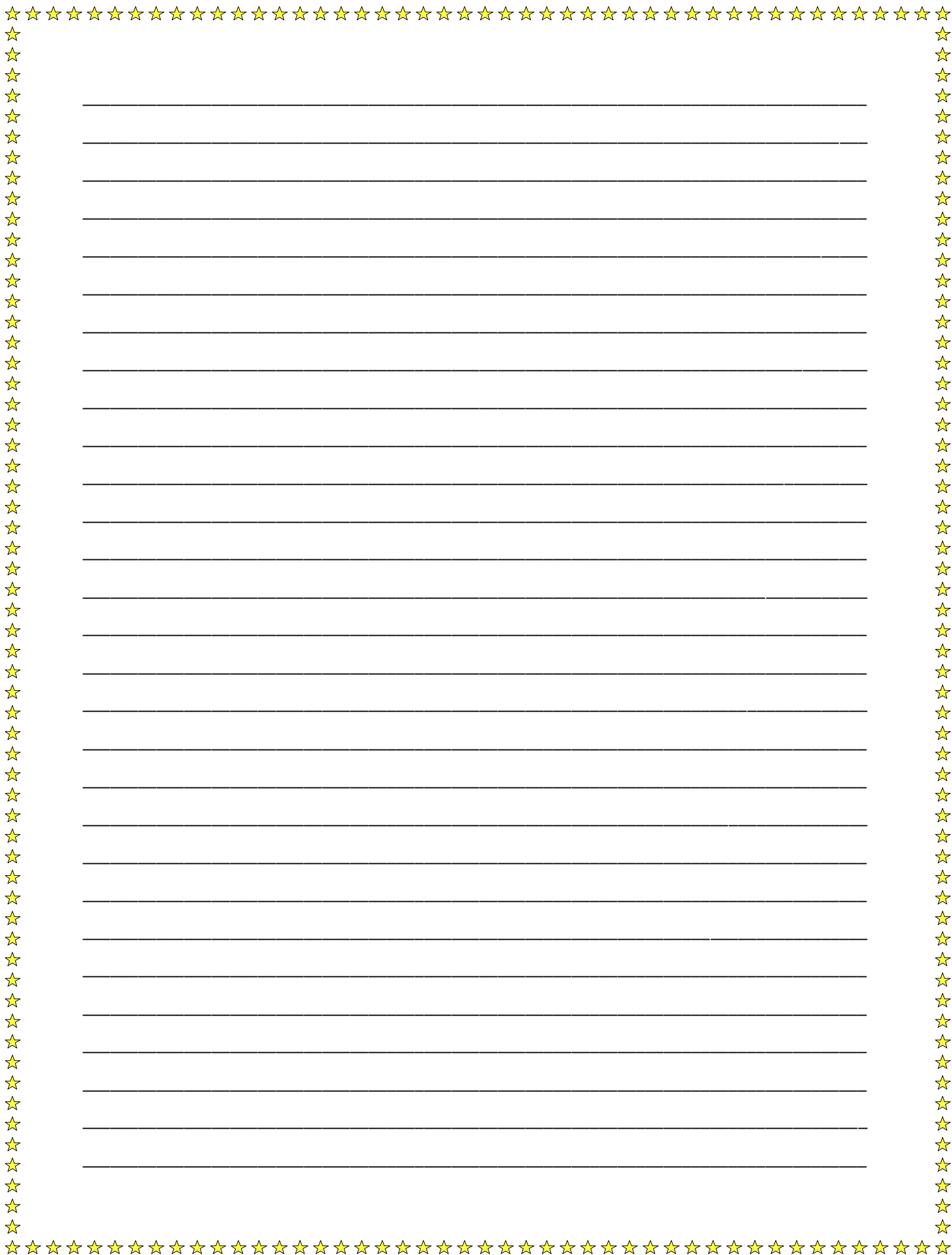
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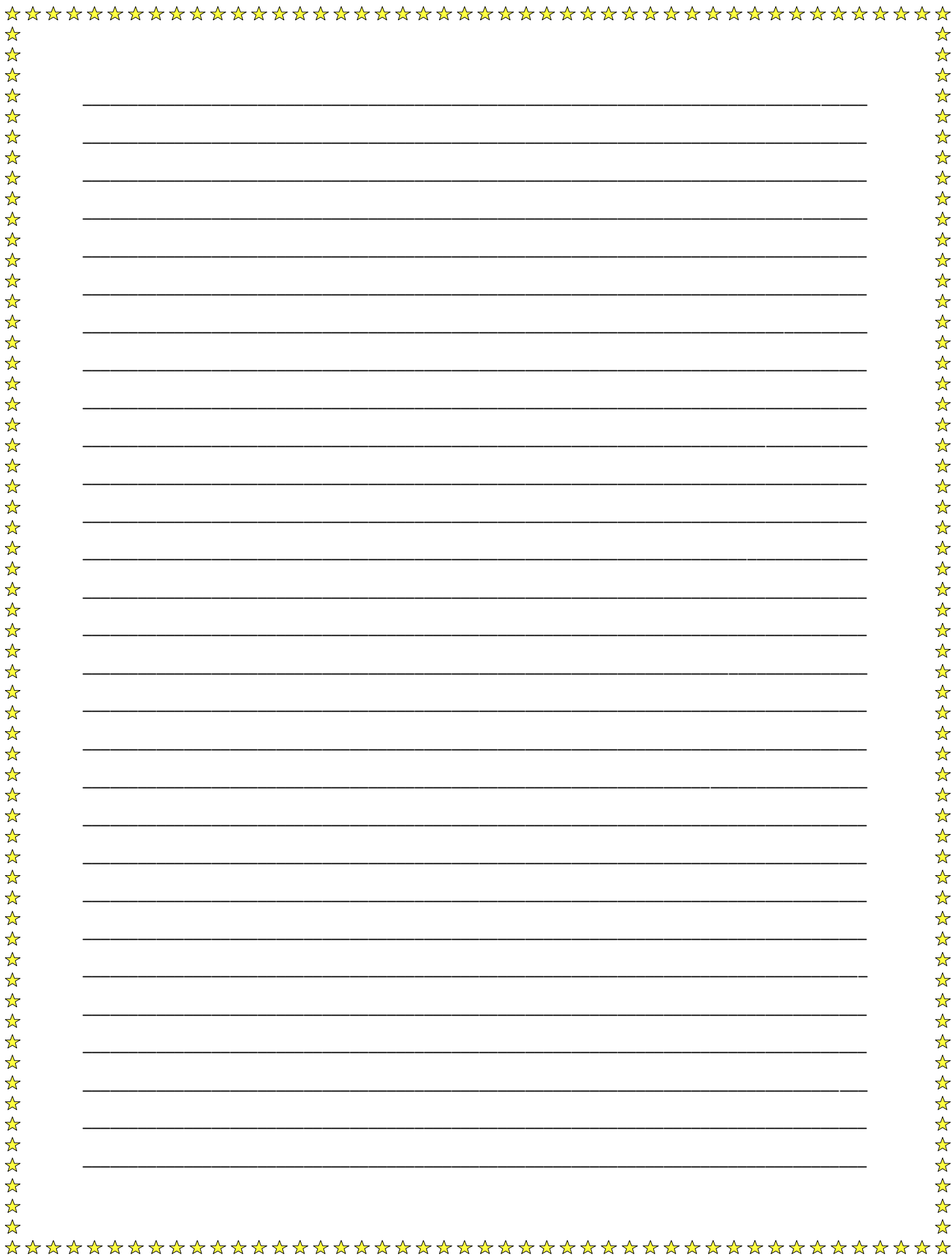
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A series of horizontal lines for writing, consisting of 20 parallel lines spaced evenly down the page.



