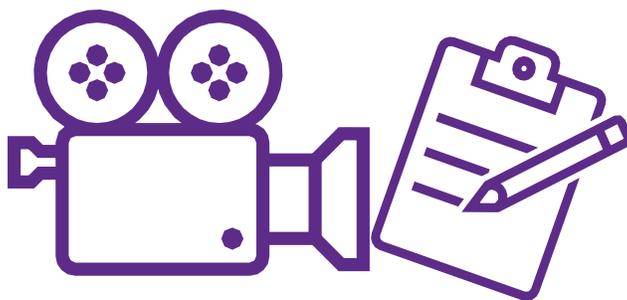


Jubilee Oral History Activity Packet



JUBILEE
Festival of Black History & Culture

What is Oral History?

Join us in celebrating this year's Virtual Jubilee: Festival of Black History & Culture! Follow the instructions in this packet, and you can learn how to become a historian and record your own family and community histories!

How do we know what happened in the past?

There are many ways we know about what happened in the past by reading and researching *primary sources*. Primary sources are first-hand accounts of an event or moment in time. These sources can include journals, newspapers, photos, letters, maps, legal documents, objects (like in a museum!), artifacts like those that archaeologists uncover, and *oral histories*.

What is Oral History?

Oral history is like storytelling. Anyone who has sat in their grandmother or grandfather's kitchen and listened to them talk about "the old days" has participated in a form of oral history. Oral history is the collection of living people's experiences and memories and depends on spoken word. In oral history projects, an interviewee describes an event for an interviewer who records the recollections and memories and creates a historical record. Oral history interviews can be collected by taking notes by hand during an interview or recording them using audio and/or video recordings.

Your stories and the stories of the people around you are special, valuable historic treasures. You and your family members can preserve unwritten history using oral history techniques.

On the **next page** is an excerpt from an Oral History taken from the transcript of an interview with *Modjeska Monteith Simkins*. Modjeska Monteith Simkins was known as the "matriarch of Civil Rights activists" in South Carolina. Born in 1899 as the granddaughter of emancipated slaves and the eldest of eight children, Simkins spent her life fighting against injustices African Americans faced every day.

When you read through the excerpt on the next page, think about what you learned from Simkins' memories. Why do you think oral history is important? How do these memories shape the history of your community?

Oral History Interview with Modjeska Simkins, November 15, 1974.

INTERVIEW EXCERPT

JACQUELYN HALL:

What about during Reconstruction?

MODJESKA SIMKINS:

No, they weren't old enough for that. You see, my father was born in 1870 and my mother was born in 1875.

JACQUELYN HALL:

What about their parents?

MODJESKA SIMKINS:

They were slaves. My father's parents and my mother's parents were slaves. They were my grandparents, they were all slaves.

JACQUELYN HALL:

Did you know them?

MODJESKA SIMKINS:

I knew my great-grandmother on my father's side and my grandmother on my father's side. My mother's parents died when I was an infant.

JACQUELYN HALL:

Were you influenced by them at all?

MODJESKA SIMKINS:

By who, my grandparents?

JACQUELYN HALL:

Yes.

MODJESKA SIMKINS:

No, my great-grandmother, I would say that she was a fearless old sister. In that period, there were certain things ... you didn't talk back to white folks, you know. And nobody was supposed to call a white man a liar, or to say that he lied. And if a black person said that a white man lied, he was whipped. My old great-grandmother, although she was a slave, she didn't fear anybody. That was my father's grandmother and I remember her quite well. And she had a daughter, who I remember, and who helped to found one of the colleges in South Carolina, Morris College. And then my mother's sisters, both of them were professional women, they were employed as teachers, too. One of them married one of the first black physicians that came into the state, and the died just about five or six years ago.



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Oral History Interview with Modjeska Simkins, November 15, 1974.

CONTINUED...

JACQUELYN HALL:

How did your parents fearlessness get impressed upon you?

MODJESKA SIMKINS:

Well, there were just certain things ... I'm trying to remember, and I wish that I could remember when I first became conscious of the fact that I was black and supposed to be different so far as color went.

JACQUELYN HALL:

You can't remember that?

MODJESKA SIMKINS:

No, I can't. I've often wished that I could remember that, because my mother ... well, in the first place, my father was a mulatto. After freedom, his mother worked as a nursemaid in a white home there in Columbia. And she became pregnant by the father of this family and my father was a result of that union. And he never, although he should have, he never fully forgave his mother for that. The result was that my mother, who was the daughter-in-law, naturally, of his mother, she understood her better and my grandmother was devoted to my mother. My father never was abusive to her, but yet, he was cold. He was a man that had very high principles, clean-cut, honest, and very high principles. And he just, although the girl being a teen-ager was evidently the victim of circumstances, he never quite got over it. And so, although we were born in the city, my father early decided to take us into the ... to buy some land on the outskirts of the city, which has now just about come into the city and is very valuable, you know, as the city has moved out. Because, at that time, he said that there was nothing for a young girl to do if she had to help the family out, except work as a nursemaid for white families. And he said that he wasn't going to have his daughters working in one of those homes. You see, that stayed with him. And so, he bought this farm land outside of Columbia and he said that he wanted his children to learn how to work and to know the value of a dollar, but he was not going to have them working in a white home...

Oral History Interview with Modjeska Simkins, November 15, 1974. Interview G-0056-1. Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) in the Southern Oral History Program Collection, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Making History

Now that you've learned what oral history is, it's your turn to record your own oral history! You're encouraged to find a family member, neighbor, or community member to interview. In your oral history interview, you'll encourage them to describe a time that they fought for change, **big OR small**.

Preparing for Your Interview

Once you find someone to interview, you'll need to take a couple of steps to prepare for the interview.

1. Pick out 3 or 4 questions, such as full name, age, date of birth, occupation (what type of job they have), where they live, etc.
2. Think of 3 or 4 questions about what their personal and family life was like as they were growing up, and 4 or 5 questions based on the event from the time period you're researching (like the time they fought for change, big OR small. *Additional questions are also welcomed and may come up naturally during the interview.*
 - a. When asking about historical or cultural events, encourage the interviewee to talk about *their own personal experiences in relation to those events*. For example: What their parents did for a living, what growing up was like, what were important events and what do they remember about them, etc.
3. When you plan your questions, make sure to avoid "yes" or "no" questions. You want the interviewee to give a descriptive answer, and you can help make this happen by asking open-ended questions. Instead of asking "Did you..." or "Were you..." **instead** ask questions like "How did...", "Why did...", or "What did...".
4. Ask your interviewee if they have any letters, photographs, or objects that relate to the time period they'll be talking about, or that are important to them in relation to the interview questions, and why. It would be interesting to see these objects in relation to the stories told during the oral history, and sometimes these objects can help trigger memories and more descriptive responses!

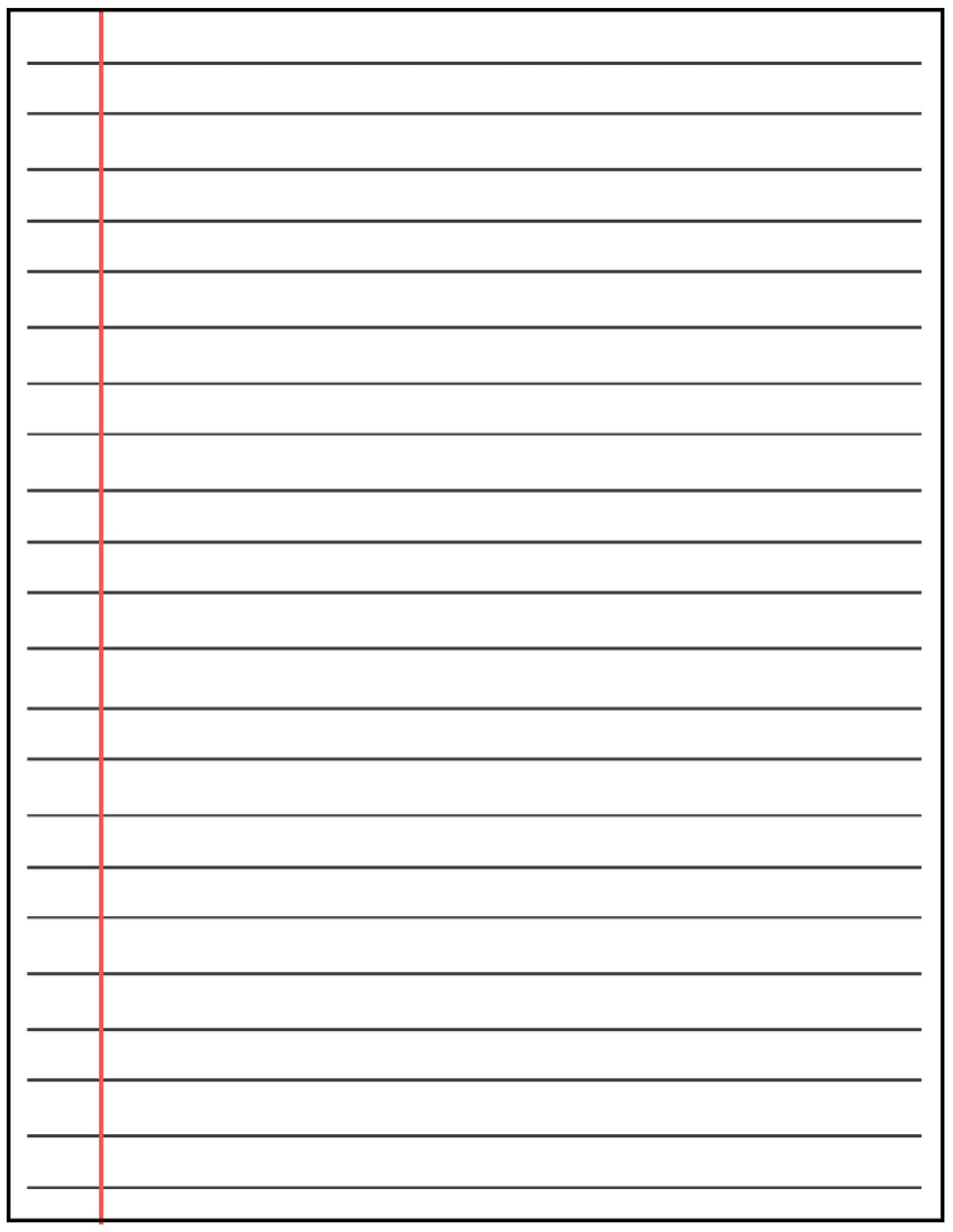
Making History

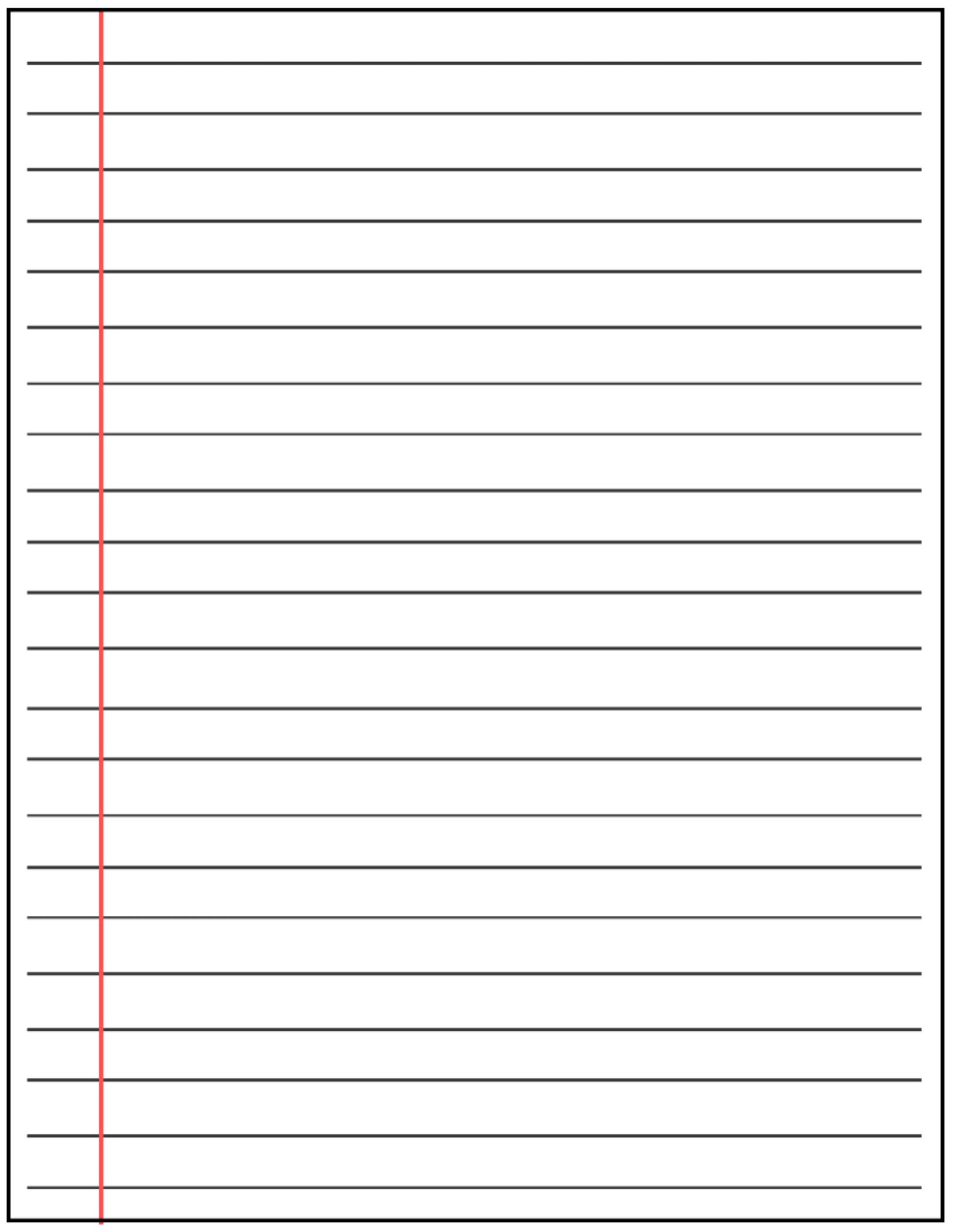
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Recording Your Interview

Choose how you'll record the interview. If you have access to a cellphone, you can record the interview using the camera or voice memo function(s). If you don't have access to a cellphone or recording device, no problem! You can take notes during the interview write down your interviewee's answers.

- a. If you choose to take notes to record your interview, here are some tips on how to jot down a lot of information quickly:
 - i. Don't worry about complete sentences.
 - ii. Write down key words to help you remember the responses until you can go back on your own and write them out after the interview.
 - iii. Listen first, make sure you understand what your interviewee is saying, then write down their answers.
 - iv. Don't be afraid to ask for help! See if there is an adult available to help your write the answers.
 - v. Running low on notebook paper? You can use the lined paper in this packet to take notes!





Making History

Reflect on what you learned from your oral history interview. Write a *journal entry* about your experience recording historical memories and helping to make history.

Consider:

1. What was your favorite part of this experience?
2. Did you run into any challenges? If so, how did you overcome them?
3. How did the oral history changed your thinking about history, and the historical event you learned about in their interview?

Now What?

Now it's time to show off your hard work! Create an article, pamphlet, poster, or book with the oral history you recorded. Don't be afraid to get *creative*! If your interviewee shared any letters, photographs or objects with your during their interview, see if they'll let you take pictures or make copies to share with the oral history interview.

Finally, present your oral history to family members, neighbors, and/or community members. Share your work in a public space! Hang your oral history project on a school, church, or community center bulletin board for everyone to see.



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