

BIRCH TREE

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LAND LESSON PLANS

BEGINNER: GRADES K-3

www.indigenousheroes.ca



Lesson Plan

Extension Activities for In-Class Learning

Suggested Grades: K-3

BEGINNER

INTRODUCTION

Relationship to land is at the heart of **Indigenous original ways of knowing and being**. Distinct Indigenous groups across what is now Canada have a relationship with the land that is unique to them. Values of reciprocity, respect, balance, and interconnection to being well or overall wellness (**spiritual, mental, emotional, physical, cultural**) are **central to learning from the land**. A tree is rooted into the earth, yet as it grows, it reaches up towards the spirit world in the sky.¹ A tree reminds us of our relationship with Father Sky while connecting us to Mother Earth.

Showing **gratitude** to the land reflects Indigenous ways of knowing and being. There are many ways to show appreciation and gratitude. When some First Nations, Métis, or Inuit (FNMI) Peoples are hunting, or harvesting plants, medicines, or items from the land used for ceremonies, they will offer prayers, thanks, and ceremonial tobacco to the land. In this activity, students will similarly practice showing gratitude to the land for what it provides for us.

This activity acts as a beginning entry point towards a deeper understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing and being relating to the land. Developing and maintaining positive relationships with Indigenous Peoples is integral when learning Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

The lesson plans activities included are basic entry point activities meant to inspire further learning, relationship building and deeper understanding specific to distinct First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. The term Indigenous is being used as a broad term which encompasses First Nations, Métis and Inuit. There are many distinct groups with distinct cultural traditions. These lessons do not go into depth, but rather offer brief introductions to some broad themes that relate to the cultures of the Indigenous Hall of Famers.

¹ McIntosh, L. G. (1995). *Native Studies: Early Years (K-4)*. Retrieved from Manitoba Education and Learning: https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/abedu/abdocs/K-4_resource.pdf

SECTION SUMMARY: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

All games have a story and can connect us back to the land with which we interact.

LACROSSE (DEYHONTSIGWA'EHS)

Deyhontsigwa'ehs (lacrosse) is a sport that was given to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (Mohawk, Onondaga, Oneida, Tuscarora, Seneca, and Cayuga) by the Creator, and therefore is referred to as the Creator's Game by many Indigenous Peoples. Deyhontsigwa'ehs somewhat translates to "they bump hips" in the Onondaga language. It is believed that lacrosse has the ability to heal and is also known as a Medicine Game.² The game has roots in healing, ceremony and connection to land.³

THE LACROSSE STICK—CONNECTION TO THE NATURAL WORLD

The lacrosse stick in itself connects people with the natural world, including land and animals. Lacrosse sticks were originally made of hickory wood with the netting made of deer sinew. The stick, made from a tree, creates a direct connection to the gifts of the land (Mother Earth). Often a stick was adorned with hawk feathers or fur from a wolf. Hawk feathers symbolize strength of vision, while the wolf fur symbolizes speed and agility.⁴

TROPHIES—CONNECTION TO THE NATURAL WORLD

The trophy featured in the [digital book's "LAND"](#) educational activities is made of an antler from an animal indigenous to this land—moose. It is common among various Indigenous Peoples, when traditionally hunting, to give thanks to the animal for providing sustenance. Every part of the animal is used, which reflects values relating to sustainability and reciprocity. Hunting was never done for sport; animals provided not only food, but also warmth, shelter and artistic mediums, as is the case for this trophy.

CEREMONY, MEDICINE, HEALING

Indigenous trees, plants and foods sustained Indigenous Peoples for tens of thousands of years. Many trees and plants are considered sacred and used for various medicinal, healing, and ceremonial purposes.⁵ For example, the white pine tree is known as Skaɣhetsi'kona (The Tree of Peace) and is considered sacred to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.⁶ The wisqoq (ash tree) is considered sacred to the Mi'kmaq.⁷ The red willow tree is used by many Nations as a medicine, for ceremonial and everyday structures. The cedar tree is also considered sacred. On the West Coast, it is interconnected to many aspects of life and used both ceremonially and artistically.

² Onondaga Nation. (2021). *Lacrosse*. Retrieved from Onondaga Nation: <https://www.onondaganation.org/culture/sports/lacrosse/>

³ CHIN. (2002). *The Social Role of Lacrosse*. Retrieved from VirtualMuseum.ca: <http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/edu/ViewLoitLo.do?method=preview&lang=EN&id=11711>

⁴ Dassele, E. (n.d.). *History of Lacrosse Sticks*. Retrieved from The Evolution of the Lacrosse Stick: <https://emmadassele.weebly.com/history-of-lacrosse.html>

⁵ Haudenosaunee Confederacy. (2021). *Culture & History: Symbols*. Retrieved from Haudenosaunee Confederacy: <https://www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.com/symbols/>

⁶ Haudenosaunee Confederacy. (2021). *Culture & History: Symbols*. Retrieved from Haudenosaunee Confederacy: <https://www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.com/symbols/>

⁷ Maguire, D. (2016). *Traditional Knowledge: Secret Powers of the Ash Tree*. Retrieved from <http://wisqoq.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Secret-Powers-of-the-Ash-Della.pdf>

RECIPROCITY

Reciprocity, and sustainable harvesting and hunting, are values and practices embedded in many Indigenous ways of knowing and being. When gifts from the land are harvested within Indigenous circles, there are protocols in place specific to each FNMI group that occur. Giving thanks to the land for providing to us is often done in exchange for what is being used. For example, tobacco, along with prayers of gratitude and intention, are offered back to the earth for the use of the rocks, plants, medicines, trees or animals. Reciprocity is evident in ceremonies as well. Many FNMI groups offer prints and gifts at ceremonies.

SPORT

Each sport played by the Indigenous Hall of Famers also connects back to the land because they are games that are played on the land. The land provides healing in many ways. Throughout Turtle Island (Canada), there are many gifts of healing that the Creator has provided. Indigenous foods and medicines grow throughout this vast landscape that many now call home. Connecting with nature has a way of healing the mind and spirit when we take the time to appreciate and respect it.

Ceremonies, as well as food and medicine gatherings, were once outlawed at one point in Canadian history under the Indian Act. Access to food and medicines was severed due to forced relocation and confinement to reserves. Colonization tactics, policies (such as the Sixties Scoop and Residential Schools), racism and industrialization all forced Indigenous Peoples off their ancestral territories and have impacted their health and wellness. The love of Mother Earth and family is embedded in original ways of knowing and being.

The severing of the mother from child, family bonds, community, child-rearing practices, ceremony, and connection to land continues to impact the transference of Indigenous ways of knowing and being to this day. Reflecting on his Residential School trauma, Hall of Famer Chief Wilton Littlechild has said:

"In my case, my grandparents' bond was almost severed by Residential School. That was a very serious trauma from many perspectives, whether it was the physical separation or the mental isolation from your own family, to the spiritual and cultural separation. Because, as you know, we weren't allowed to speak our own language or practice our own culture; in fact, they were outlawed completely."

Although lacrosse originates with the Haudenosaunee, there was a time in history that players were excluded from national tournaments because they were Indigenous. Racism towards Indigenous Peoples persists today both on and off the field, yet these Hall of Famers have been able to transcend the hate to achieve **greatness in sport** and do **good in their communities**.

DIGITAL BOOK

“LAND” EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY

SET UP:

- Visit the [Indigenous Sport Heroes Education Experience \(http://indigenousheroes.ca/\)](http://indigenousheroes.ca/) and then display the [LAND](#) digital interactivity on a smart board or students independently interact with digital platforms.
- Arrange students in a circle or U-shape when they are sharing their thoughts and/or quotes and summaries to model [Indigenous Circle Pedagogy](#).

SHARING CIRCLE | INDIGENOUS CIRCLE PEDAGOGY:

An informal sharing circle can be used in the classroom to facilitate learning and shared discussions. The process involves forming a complete circle. In the circle, everyone is valued and respected as equals. Students show their peers respect in the circle by listening and not interrupting while their peers are sharing. Back-and-forth conversations across the circle between participants is not a part of the sharing circle process. An object such as a rock, shell, stick, or even a pencil can be used to pass around the circle. Only the person holding the object is allowed to speak (from their heart) while others listen. One person begins the process by stating the topic of the talking circle, which in a school setting it is usually the teacher. The flow of sharing moves one-by-one going clockwise from the starting person. If a student chooses to pass, they can. Once everyone has had a chance to speak, the cycle of the sharing circle is complete. The teacher can ask if anyone has more thoughts to add, and if so, pass the object clockwise until it reaches the person who wishes to share again rather than standing up and crossing through the center of the circle. The students should not comment or discuss what their peers have shared; instead each person who takes a turn to speak/share should focus on the topic of the circle. Students are reminded to practice listening and patience until it is their turn to share in the circle.

PROCESS: Interact with the digital “[LAND](#)” activity, which includes examples of statements that reflect various FNMI Peoples’ ways of knowing and being that connect to reciprocity and their relationships with the land. Quotes about interconnection to land and reciprocity are revealed by clicking on the tree’s buds that grow into leaves. Within the digital activity, students will also learn how to say “thank you” in various Indigenous languages represented by the Hall of Famers.

OPTIONS

1. INDIVIDUAL: Students interact with the digital tree independently by listening to the quotes and practicing saying “thank you” in various Indigenous languages.
2. SMALL GROUP: The teacher assigns small groups and students take turns interacting with the tree by listening to quotes and practicing saying “thank you” in various Indigenous languages.
3. WHOLE CLASS: Teacher, or selected students, interact(s) with the tree that reveals sound bites on leaves. The teacher reads aloud the quotes projected onto an interactive smartboard or assigns one student per quote to interact with the tree and read aloud to the class.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITY #1

INTERCONNECTION TO LAND & RECIPROCITY

ASK: “If a tree was your mother, what kind or loving words would you say to it?”

SHARE: Ask students to share their answers orally with the rest of the class.

TELL: Explain what the word “reciprocity” means, and tell students about the act of reciprocity practiced within Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

RECIPROCITY: Reciprocity (giving thanks or giving back) is a practice and/or value embedded in Indigenous ways of knowing and being. When gifts from the land are harvested within Indigenous circles, there are protocols specific to each FNMI group that occur. Giving thanks to the land for providing for us is often done in exchange for what is being used. For example, tobacco, prayers of gratitude and intention for the use of the rocks, plants, medicines, trees or animals are offered back to the earth. Reciprocity is also practiced when seeking knowledge from Elders in ceremonies. Reciprocity and sustainable harvesting and hunting are embedded into ways of life, original ways of knowing and being. Reciprocity acknowledges a mutual exchange of benefits or privileges and is expressed through the act of exchanging gifts.⁸

LISTEN: Interact with the [digital book’s “LAND”](#) educational activity to hear examples of how to say “thank you” in languages represented by the Indigenous Hall of Famers inducted into Canada’s Sports Hall of Fame.

PRACTICE: As a class, practice saying “thank you” in an Indigenous language included in the digital activity.

SEARCH: Teacher leads the class in researching how to spell and say “thank you” in an Indigenous language local to the area in which they reside.

TAKE IT OUTSIDE: If there is a green space on the school grounds, go for a walk. If there is a tree, go to the tree and say “thank you” to the tree for cleaning the air for you to breathe.

⁸ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. (n.d.). *Protocols, Symbols, and Ceremonies*. Retrieved from National Inquiry into Indigenous Women and Girls: <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/protocols-symbols-and-ceremonies/>

IN-CLASS ACTIVITY #2

INDIGENOUS TREES, PLANTS & MEDICINES

PREPARATION:

- Create a background using the silhouette of a bare tree or berry bush for a bulletin board or mural that will display the students' decorated responses placed on the branches.

SET UP: Arrange the students so they are sitting in a circle or U-shape. Teachers should also sit in the circle as they act as the starting point for student sharing.

SHARE: Share examples of Indigenous plants and medicines using the examples and links provided below, or choose plants and medicines, or a tree, plant, berry bush, that is significant to the local Indigenous Peoples of the students' area.

REFLECT:

Have students reflect on and discuss the following questions:

- What natural elements help the plants and medicines to grow and flourish?
Answer examples: sun, rain, soil
- How can people help the plants, medicines and trees flourish and grow?
Answer examples: respect, be kind, be thankful, clean air, water, protect, take care, love

CREATE:

- Students write down answers on a leaf or berry cluster shape.
- Teachers can pre-write a variety of answers on the blank templates included below or have students write one word, sentence or paragraph on the template depending on the level of the students.
- Colour/decorate leaves or berry template.
- Display written response/keywords on a large bulletin board or wall around the base of a tree or stems of a berry tree.

****Remind students that the paper they are using comes from trees and to practice thankfulness for the tree that provides the materials they use in everyday life.*

INDIGENOUS TREES & PLANTS

FOOD & MEDICINE SAMPLES

This chart provides examples of indigenous plants, foods, and medicines that could be used to support the in-class activity. The teacher may also find examples that are local to the Indigenous groups within their geographical area. Many of these examples listed are used by various Indigenous Peoples across Canada, despite this document only listing specific FNMI Peoples and languages that represent the Hall of Famers featured in the digital book.

Okiniwapakwaniya Nêhiyawak (Plains Cree)	Wild Rose	Tea, jam, food, vitamin	http://www.yourcier.org/uploads/2/5/6/1/25611440/sagow_pimachiwin_guidebook.pdf
lii tiî'd mashkek Michif (Métis)/ Nêhiyawak (Plains Cree)	Labrador tea	Tea, seasoning, medicine	https://www.foodfirstnl.ca/rcr-archive/2013/07/labrador-tea-an-abundant-local-edible-wild-plant
Skaçhetsi'kona (Haudenosaunee Confederacy)	The Tree of Peace (Eastern White Pine)	Sacred tree, ceremonial	https://www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.com/symbols/ https://serenityinthegarden.blogspot.com/2010/04/eastern-white-pine-tree-of-peace.html
ᖃpeᖃulhp <i>Hulqumínúm</i> (Snuneymuxw First Nation, Coast Salish)	Cedar	Baskets, carvings, canoes, art, medicine, rope, clothing, structures, ceremonial	https://www.britannica.com/plant/Western-red-cedar http://www.sfu.ca/~gerdts/papers/HulquminumWords.pdf
K'oh Gwichya (Gwich'in)	Red Willow Alder	Dye, food, fuel, medicine	https://www.gwichin.ca/plants/red-willow-alder
Devil's Club (Squamish)	Devil's Club	Medicinal: respiratory ailments, gastrointestinal Ailments	https://coastalfirstnations.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Going-Wild-web-use.pdf
Sipatsimo (Kainai Blackfoot) wîhkaskwa ᐃᐱᐅᐅᐅᐅ Nêhiyawak (Plains Cree)	Sweetgrass	Sacred plant for ceremony and medicine.	https://galileo.org/kainai/sweetgrass/
Ken' Niiohontésha Kanien'keha (Mohawk)	Strawberry	Food, jam, ceremony, medicine, tea, vitamin	https://wabano.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Strawberry-Teachings--ENG--FR.pdf

IN-CLASS ACTIVITY #3

LAND POETRY

PRESENT: The question “How is the earth like our mother?”

SHARE: Ask students to share their answers verbally with the rest of the class.

CREATE: Take turns to finish the sentence:

- “The earth is like our mother. She _____.”

EXTENSION: Record sound/video clips of children saying the sentences with their ideas. Share the recordings within the school or on social media.

CANADA'S SPORTS HALL OF FAME SOCIAL MEDIA HANDLES



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[@CANsportshall](https://www.facebook.com/CANsportshall)



[@sportshall](https://twitter.com/sportshall)

HASHTAGS

#IndigenousSportHeroes

#EducateandInspire

IN-CLASS CLOSING ACTIVITY #4

LEAVE, STICK, ROCK, SHARE

SET UP: Circle or U-shape with teacher included in the circle.

PROCESS: Each student takes turns following the sequence of the circle or U-shape.

GUIDED SHARE:

- LEAVE: One word of gratitude that you would LEAVE to the earth.
- STICK: One memory of the activity that will STICK with you.
- ROCK: One thing that ROCKED you so much you will share it with someone.
- SHARE: Take snapshots of student work that was created throughout the process and SHARE them on social media.

CANADA'S SPORTS HALL OF FAME SOCIAL MEDIA HANDLES



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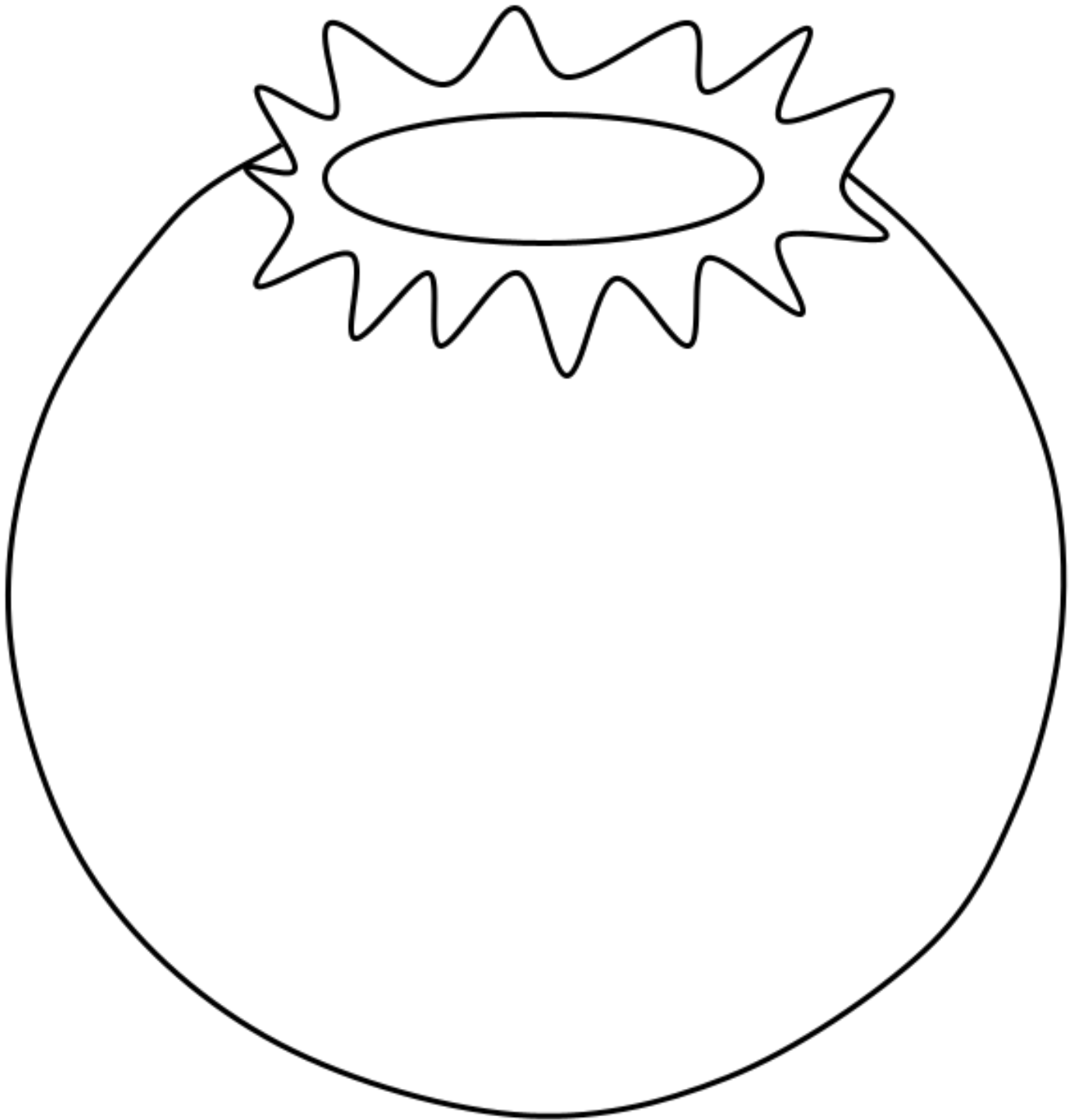
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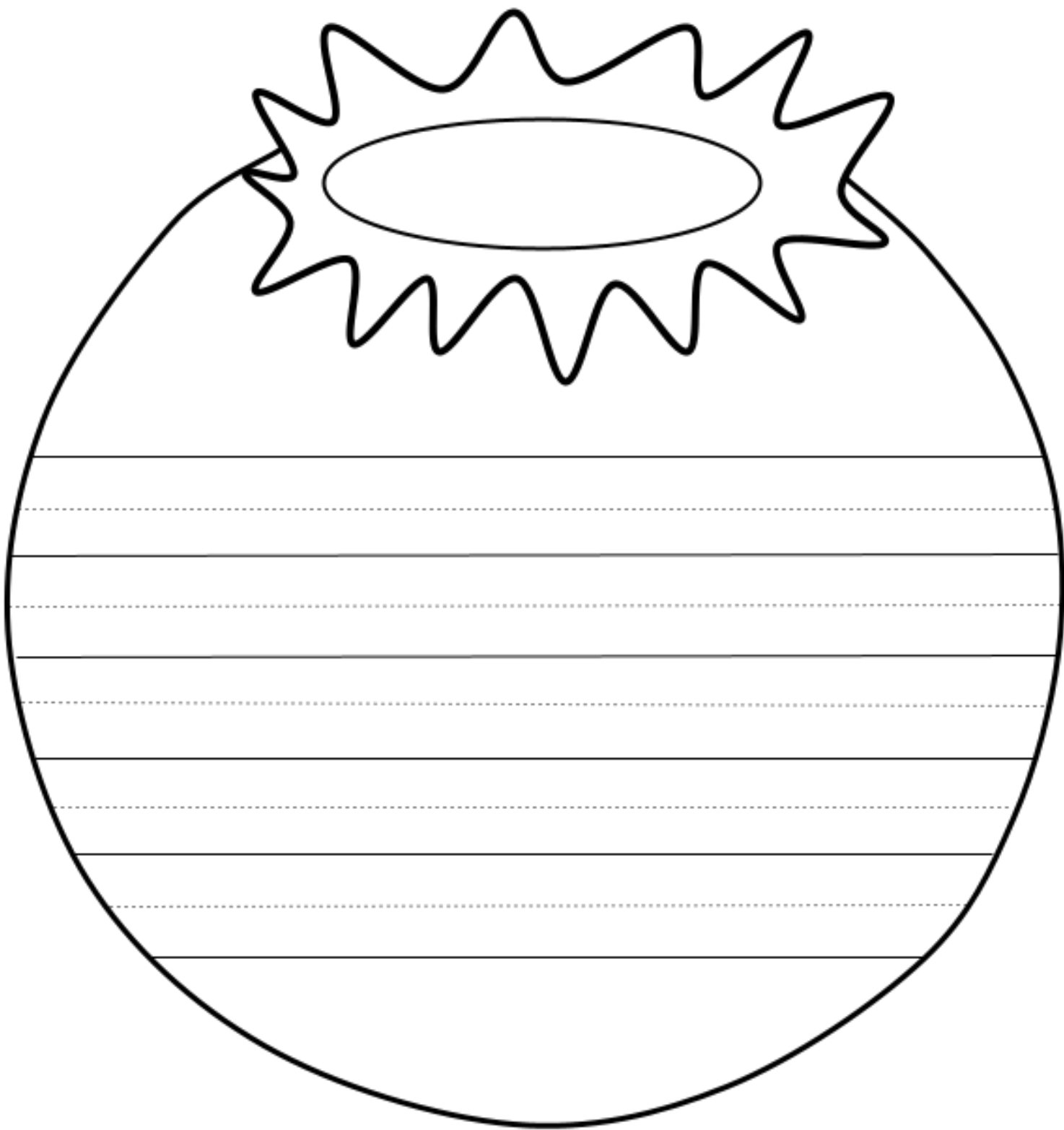
HASHTAGS

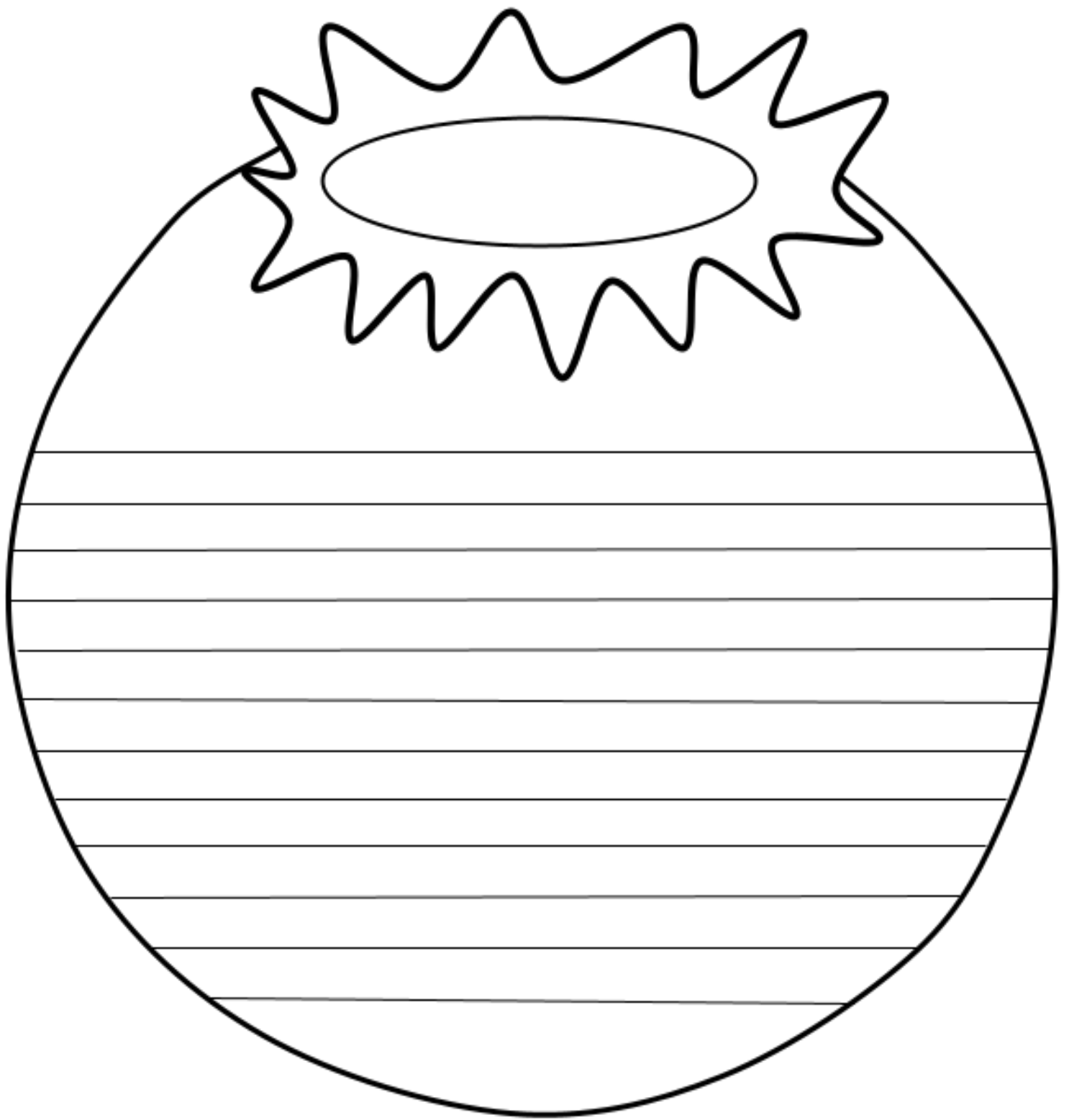
#IndigenousSportHeroes

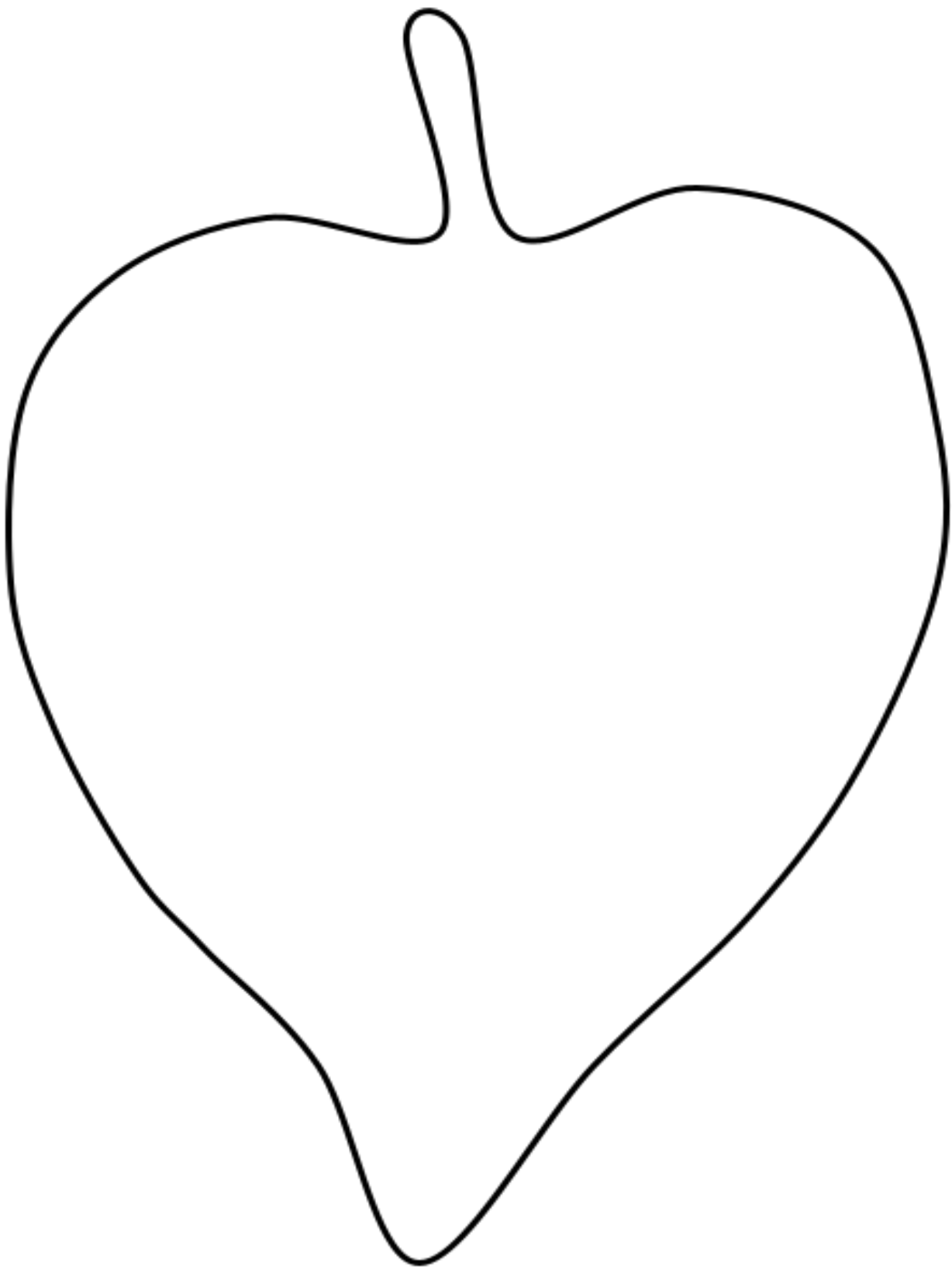
#EducateandInspire

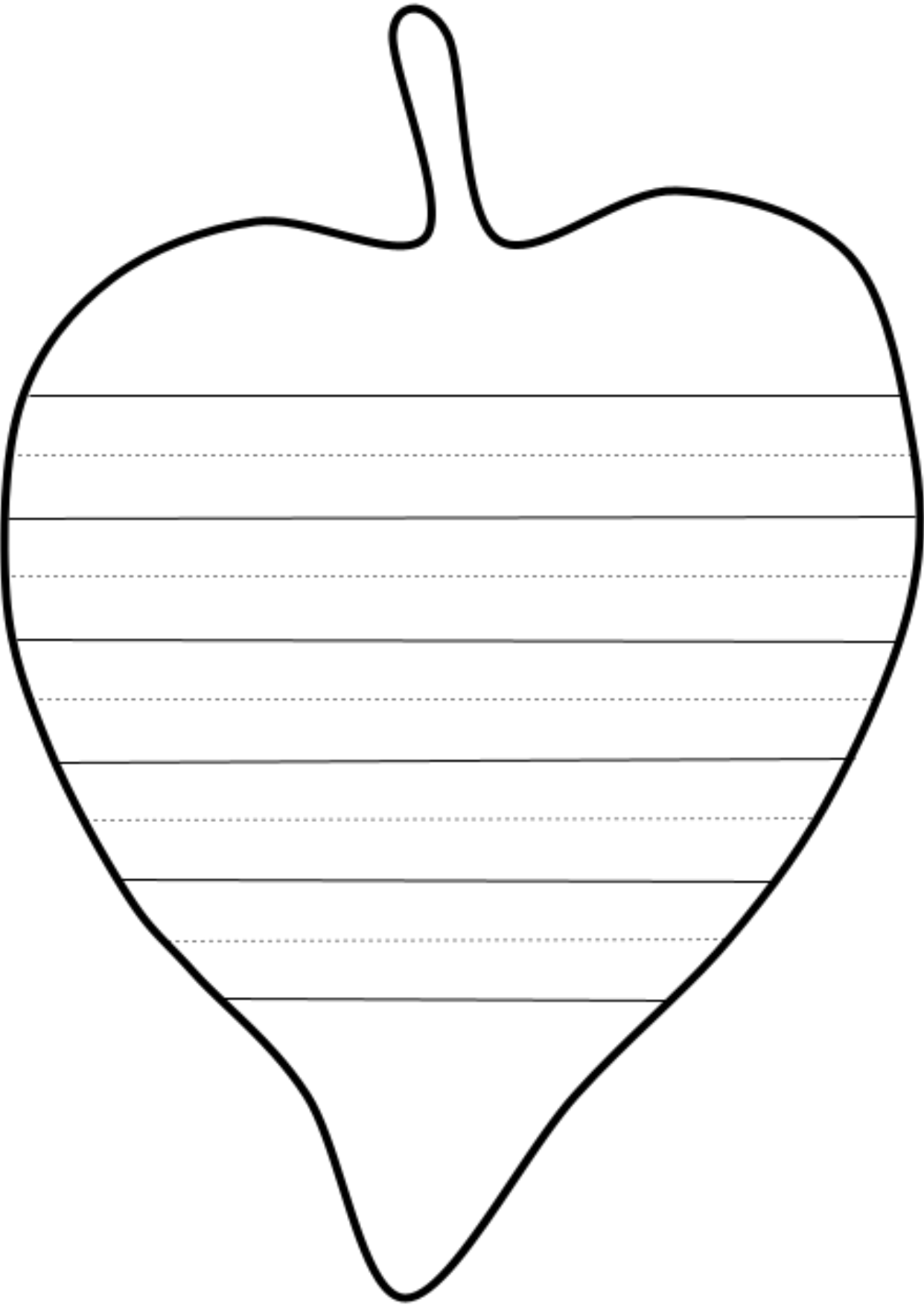
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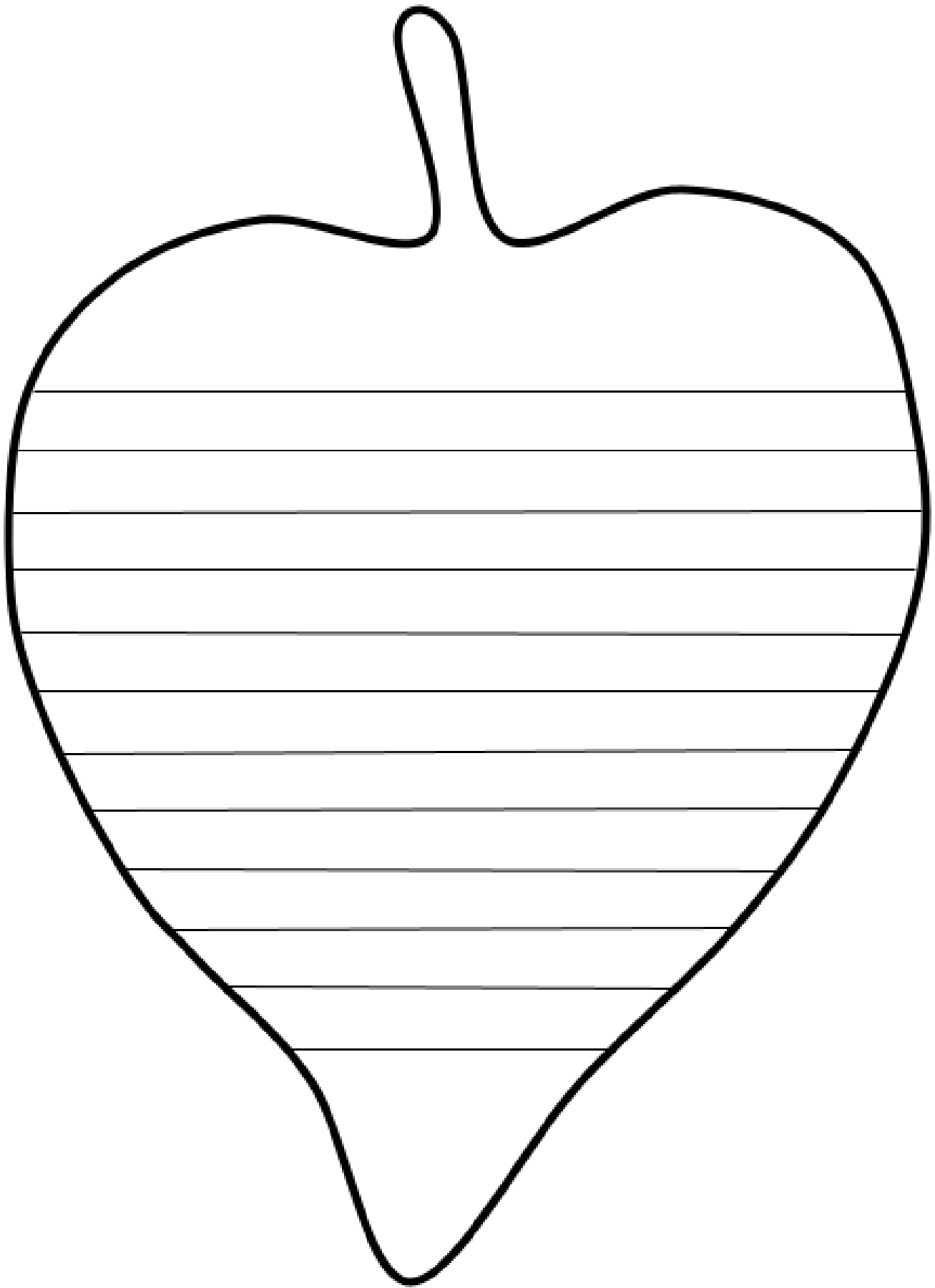












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