

Society & Culture: Pop Culture

Madame Tussauds Sydney — Schools Resource

NSW Syllabus: Society and Culture Stage 6 (2013) | **Stage:** Stage 6 (Preliminary/HSC)

Note for teachers: Please cross-check exact outcome codes against your school's current syllabus documentation.

About this resource

This resource uses Madame Tussauds Sydney's collection to explore the HSC Popular Culture depth study — examining how popular culture is produced, consumed and connected to personal and social identity.

Curriculum outcomes addressed

- **H5** – explains continuity and change and their implications for societies and cultures
- **H6** – analyses relationships in various social and cultural contexts
- **H10** – applies social and cultural research methods
- **H11** – selects and uses appropriate communication forms

Key inquiry question

How does popular culture both reflect and construct our sense of identity and belonging?

Exercise 1: Theorising Popular Culture (Classroom — Pre-Visit)

Format: Classroom based | 30 minutes

1. Revise key concepts: popular culture, representation, identity, media construction.
2. Discuss: how do fans construct identity and belonging around celebrities or cultural icons (fandoms, subcultures, imitation)?
3. Introduce social theories relevant to the depth study (e.g. functionalist, interactionist perspectives) as analytical lenses for the fieldwork task.

Exercise 2: Fieldwork Observation (Excursion — In-Venue)

Format: Excursion based | Individual fieldwork worksheet

Conduct informal observational research during your visit.

1. Observe visitor behaviour around 2–3 figures — note photography habits, poses, comments, emotional reactions.
2. Record how the venue itself uses techniques of representation and staging to construct meaning around each figure.
3. Reflect: what does this observed behaviour suggest about the relationship between popular culture, fame and personal identity?

Exercise 3: Analytical Essay (Classroom — Post-Visit)

Format: Classroom based | Extended task

Write an analytical essay (600–800 words) applying a social theory of your choice to explain the relationship between popular culture, identity and society, using your fieldwork observations as primary evidence alongside at least two academic or credible secondary sources.

Teacher note: This task can be scaffolded toward the Personal Interest Project (PIP) research methodology, or used as practice for the Popular Culture depth study HSC response.

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Exercise 1: Theorising Popular Culture (Classroom — Pre-Visit)

Before the visit, revise key concepts and practise applying a social theory (an “analytical lens”) to help you explain how popular culture connects to identity and society.

Key concepts — in your own words

Define each term in plain language and add one example (it can be from music, sport, film/TV, gaming, influencers, celebrities, memes, or brands).

1. Popular culture:

Example: _____

1. Representation:

Example: _____

1. Identity:

Example: _____

1. Media construction:

Example: _____

Identity and belonging in popular culture (fandoms, subcultures, imitation)

Answer the questions using at least one example of a celebrity/cultural icon or fandom you know.

Example: _____

1. How do fans show belonging (e.g. language, inside jokes, clothing, online behaviour, events, “stan” culture)?

2. What do fans gain from this identity (confidence, community, status, meaning, escape, values, role models)? Explain.

3. What pressures or downsides can come with it (stereotypes, exclusion, consumerism, online conflict, unrealistic standards)?

Choosing a social theory as your “lens”

Pick **one** theory you will try to apply during the excursion and later in your writing.

- **Functionalist** (popular culture can create shared values, social cohesion, and “common culture”).
- **Interactionist** (meaning is made through everyday interactions—symbols, shared understandings, micro-level behaviour).

1. My chosen theory: _____
2. In one or two sentences, what does this theory focus on?

3. Predict: what might this theory help you notice at Madame Tussauds (behaviour, symbols, shared meanings, social roles, group identity, consumer behaviour)?

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Exercise 2: Fieldwork Observation (Excursion — In-Venue)

Conduct an informal observation during your visit. Your goal is to collect examples you can later use as **primary evidence** about popular culture, representation, and identity.

Choose your focus figures (2–3)

Write the name of each figure and where it is located (zone/room). Try to choose figures from different categories (e.g. music, sport, film, royalty, influencers, superheroes).

Figure 1: _____ **Location:** _____

Figure 2: _____ **Location:** _____

Figure 3 (optional): _____ **Location:** _____

Observation notes (repeat for each figure)

Record what you **see and hear**. Aim for specific details rather than general statements.

Figure 1 — Visitor behaviour

- **Photography habits:** selfies, group shots, angles, filters, repeating photos, posing time, use of props.

- **Poses and body language:** copying the celebrity's pose, "hugging", touching, facial expressions.

- **Comments/emotions:** words you overhear, excitement, humour, embarrassment, admiration, disappointment.

Figure 1 — Representation and staging

- **Setting:** background, props, lighting, sound, signage, themed environment.

- **Message being constructed:** what “story” is told about this person/icon (power, relatability, glamour, heroism, authenticity)?

- **Audience positioning:** how are visitors encouraged to interact (photo points, instructions, queue layout, “share” prompts)?

Figure 2 — Visitor behaviour

- **Photography habits:** selfies, group shots, angles, filters, repeating photos, posing time, use of props.

- **Poses and body language:** copying the celebrity’s pose, “hugging”, touching, facial expressions.

- **Comments/emotions:** words you overhear, excitement, humour, embarrassment, admiration, disappointment.

Figure 2 — Representation and staging

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Figure 3 — Visitor behaviour

- **Photography habits:** selfies, group shots, angles, filters, repeating photos, posing time, use of props.
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- **Poses and body language:** copying the celebrity’s pose, “hugging”, touching, facial expressions.
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Figure 3 — Representation and staging

- **Setting:** background, props, lighting, sound, signage, themed environment.
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- **Message being constructed:** what “story” is told about this person/icon (power, relatability, glamour, heroism, authenticity)?
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- **Audience positioning:** how are visitors encouraged to interact (photo points, instructions, queue layout, “share” prompts)?
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Reflection (link to identity and theory)

1. What did the visitor behaviour suggest about identity and belonging (who people want to be seen as, what groups they align with, what “status” is shown)?

2. Apply your chosen theory: explain one observation using your theory as a lens (use at least one specific detail you recorded).

Exercise 3: Analytical Essay (Classroom — Post-Visit)

Plan and write a 600–800 word analytical essay. Your aim is to explain the relationship between popular culture, identity and society using (1) a social theory, (2) your fieldwork observations, and (3) at least two credible secondary sources.

Build your argument (thesis)

1. **Key inquiry question:** How does popular culture both reflect and construct our sense of identity and belonging?
2. In 1–2 sentences, write your thesis (your main argument). Use the words **popular culture**, **identity** and **society**.

Evidence bank (you will use this in body paragraphs)

Fill in at least **two** fieldwork observations and **two** secondary sources you can use as evidence.

Fieldwork observations (primary evidence)

1. **Observation 1 (specific detail):**

What it suggests about identity/society: _____

1. **Observation 2 (specific detail):**

What it suggests about identity/society: _____

Secondary sources (credible research)

1. **Source 1:** Title/author/where you found it (book, article, academic site, museum/education site).

Useful quote or idea: _____

1. **Source 2:** Title/author/where you found it.

Useful quote or idea: _____

C. Plan your structure (intro + body paragraphs + conclusion)

1. **Chosen social theory:** _____
2. **Body paragraph 1** — main point (topic sentence) + evidence you will use:

Evidence (fieldwork + source): _____

1. **Body paragraph 2** — main point + evidence you will use:

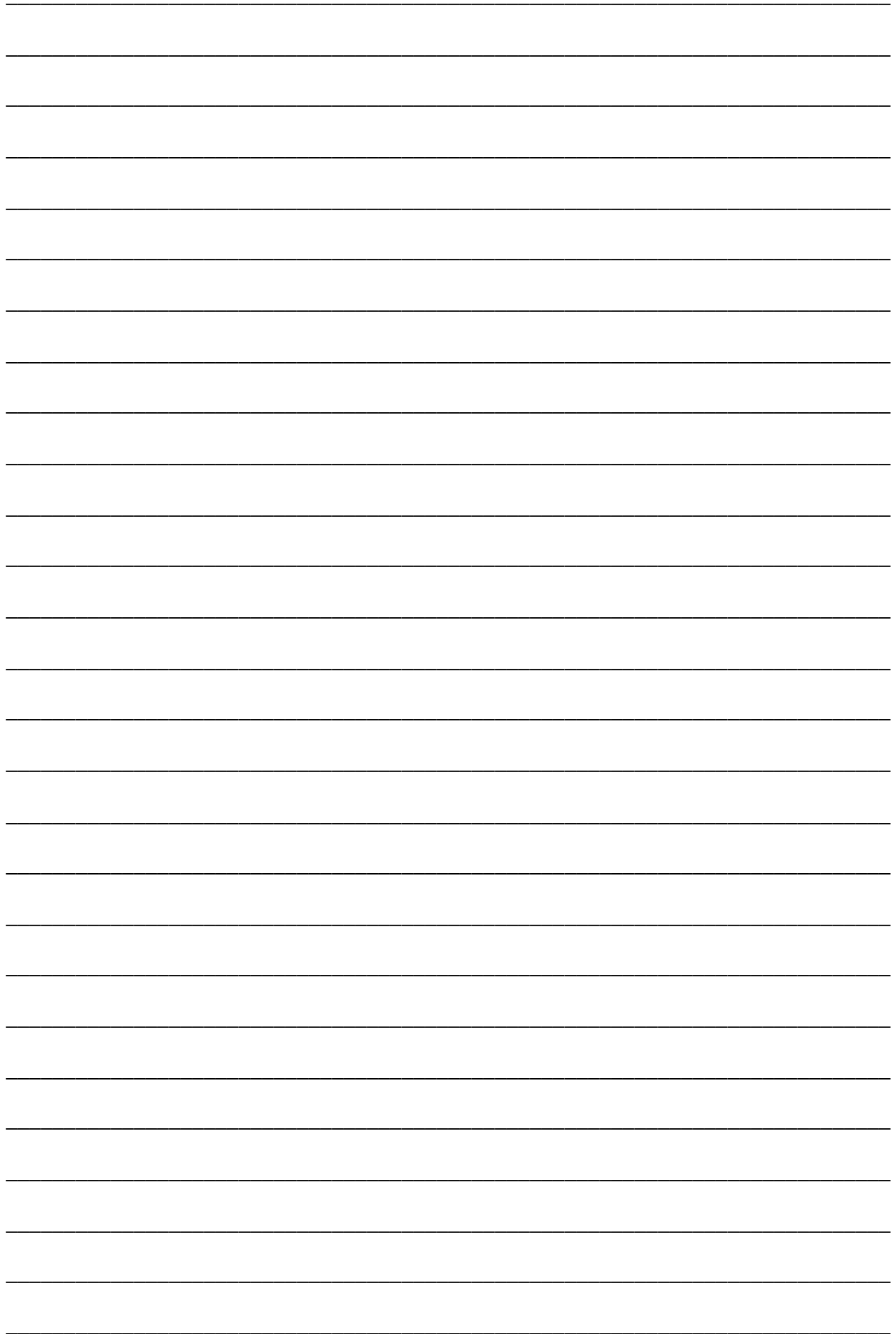
Evidence (fieldwork + source): _____

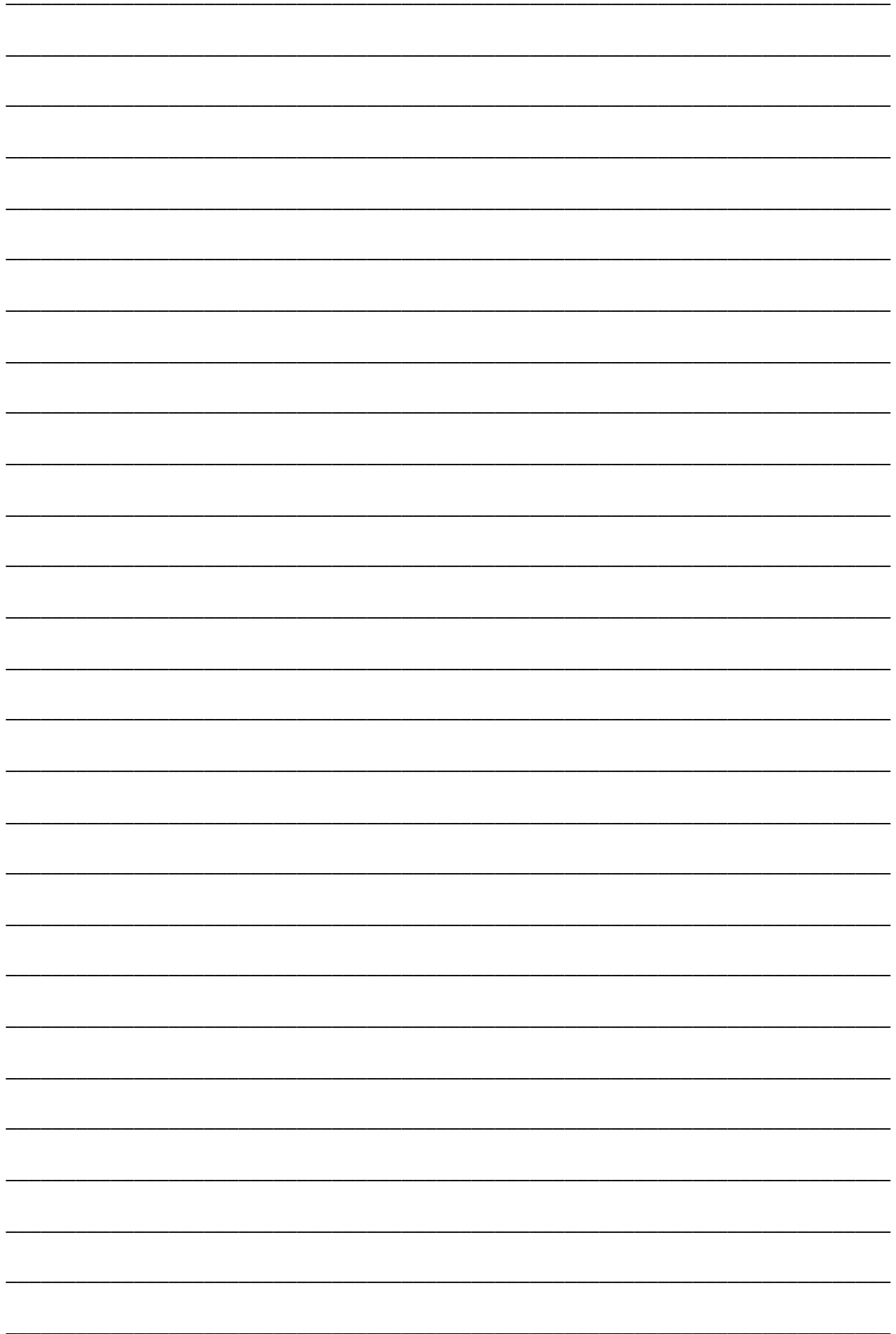
1. **Body paragraph 3 (optional)** — main point + evidence you will use:

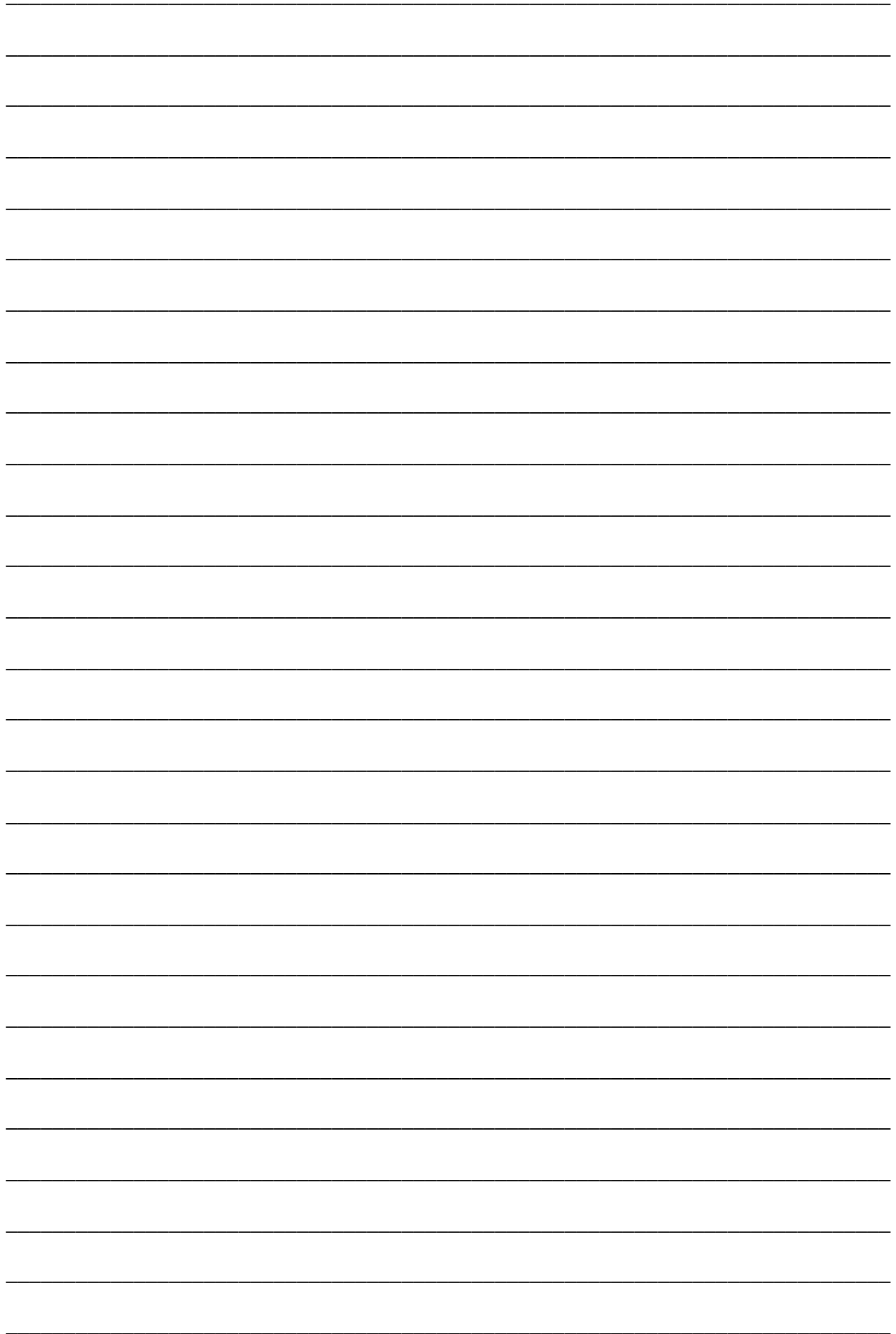
Evidence (fieldwork + source): _____

D. Essay writing space (draft)

Write your essay draft below. Remember to use paragraphs, link back to your thesis, and integrate your fieldwork evidence.







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