

**A TEACHER'S  
RESOURCE BOOK FOR  
*MAY 4TH VOICES:*  
*KENT STATE, 1970***

*Teaching History and Social Justice in the Classroom*

*Edited by John L. Morris, Ph.D.  
with contributions by educators from  
around the United States*

A COPUBLICATION OF THE KENT HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND  
THE KENT STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
KENT, OHIO

## SCENE ONE: THE LOTTERY

Context: 1960s and the Vietnam War

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### SYNOPSIS

This scene provides context for scenes that follow. It begins with an introduction by Maj Ragain, a poet whose work explores his experiences during this tumultuous time period. Maj introduces the audience to Kent in 1969. The scene concludes with a tense confrontation between a high school anti-war demonstrator and other students. Voices of multiple characters are introduced (students, professors, National Guardsman, a professor, and a high school teacher).

### CONTEXT AND CONNECTIONS

*George Stanley McGovern*, born July 19, 1922, is an historian, author, and former U.S. Representative, U.S. Senator, and the Democratic Party nominee in the 1972 presidential election. McGovern's long-shot, grassroots-based 1972 presidential campaign found triumph in gaining the Democratic nomination, but left the party badly split ideologically.

*Draft Lottery* began on Dec. 1, 1969, when the Selective Service System of the United States conducted two lotteries to determine the order of call of military service in the Vietnam War for men born between 1944 and 1950. "The draft" occurred during a longer period of conscription in the United States from just before WWII to 1973. The days of the year were represented by the numbers 1 to 366 written on slips of paper. The slips were placed in separate plastic capsules that were mixed in a shoebox and then dumped into a deep glass jar. Capsules were drawn from the jar one at a time.

The first day number drawn was 257, on September 14, so all registrants with that birthday were assigned lottery number 1. All men of draft age, born 1944 to 1950, who shared a birthday would be called to serve at once. In fact the first 195 birthdates were later called to serve in order 1 to 195. The last date called was September 24, lottery number 195.

*Coxey's Army* was composed of unemployed workers from the United States, led by Ohio businessman Jacob Coxey, who marched on Washington D.C. in 1894, the second year of a four-year economic depression that was the worst in the United States to that time. Officially named the Army of the Commonweal in Christ, its nickname came from its leader and was more enduring. It was the first significant popular protest march on Washington and the expression "Enough food to feed Coxey's Army" originates from this march.

*The Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam* was formed as the war in Vietnam raged on and public opinion swayed against the war. On Oct. 15, 1969, an estimated two million activists from across the country gathered in Washington D.C. to protest the war. To this day, the Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam remains one of the largest demonstrations in American history.

*Vietnam Veterans Against the War* (VVAW) was originally created to oppose the Vietnam War. VVAW describes itself as a "national veterans' organization" that campaigns for peace, justice, and the rights of all United States military veterans." It publishes a twice-yearly newsletter, *The Veteran*, previously published more frequently as *First Casualty* (1971–1972) and then as *Winter Soldier* (1973–1975). VVAW considers itself as "anti-war," although not in the pacifistic sense.

Membership varied greatly from almost 25,000 veterans during the height of the war to fewer than a couple thousand in subsequent decades. While the member veterans were a small fraction of the millions that served between 1965–75, the VVAW is widely considered to be among the most influential anti-war organizations of that era.

*Students for a Democratic Society* was a student activist movement in the United States that was one of the main iconic representations of the country's New Left liberal political organizations. The organization developed and expanded rapidly in the mid-1960s before dissolving at its last convention in 1969. Participatory

democracy, direct action, radicalism, student power, shoestring budgets, and its organizational structure are all present in varying degrees in current American student activist groups. Though various organizations have been formed in subsequent years as proposed national networks for left-wing student organizing, none has approached the scale of SDS, and most have lasted only a few years.

### INITIAL UNDERSTANDING

1. What were teach-ins?
2. What is napalm?
3. Who were the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)?

### INTERPRETATION

1. What is ironic about the crowd's reaction?
2. Why would the SDS members face beatings and the singing of "The Star-Spangled Banner" by their assailants?
3. How have your own ideas about the events surrounding this scene changed as a result of reading this scene?

### REFLECTION

1. Why were 1967 and 1968 such stressful years in America?
2. What would a biology professor wearing a moustache suggest to his peers? Why were faculty members afraid of being considered "radicals"?
3. What concerns did Black and other minority students have during this time period? Why do you think they hesitated to join the Anti-War movement at Kent State?
4. Why do you think so many people showed up for the napalming of the dog?

### EXTENDED RESPONSE WRITING PROMPTS

1. Explain the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy and their impact on the U.S.
2. Respond to the following quote:

I think the country came as close to a civil war between generations as you'd probably ever want to see. Because you had old versus young; you had fathers against sons; you had generation against generation. You can call it what you want. But Kent State brought to a boiling point the feelings on both sides.

—Female Student 2

### SCENE SPECIFIC CROSS-CURRICULAR PROJECT CONNECTIONS

*Arts Connection*—Create a newspaper cover for the "Napalming the Dog" story.

*Literary/Historical Connection*—Using the Wordsworth quote about the French Revolution ("Bliss it was to be alive, but to be young was very heaven . . ."), relate the French Revolution to the Counter-Culture Revolution of the 1960s and 70s.

*Mathematics Connection*—Research the method Selective Service to choose draftees for the Vietnam War. What is your response to its design? Was the method fair or not?

*Literary Connection*—Research Maj Ragan and select one of his other literary works on the Vietnam Era. Can you find other thematic connections to *May 4th Voices*?

*Language Arts Connection*—Write a narrative from one of the following perspectives at the end of Scene 1: the high school anti-war demonstrator, the students whose brothers or fathers were fighting in the Vietnam War, or the high school teacher. Explore the thoughts and emotions that your individual perspective would be experiencing during this confrontation.

**Ohio Arts Council**  
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ISBN 978-1-60635-166-6

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The poem "May 4, 1970/A Memory" by Maj Ragain was first published in 2005 by Pavement Saw Press, Columbus, Ohio, in *Hungry Ghost Surrenders His Tacklebox* by Maj Ragain and is reprinted with permission.

Cataloging information for this title is available at the Library of Congress.

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