

**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*

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# SCENE FOUR: THE RALLY

## Monday Leading Up

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### SYNOPSIS

In Scene Four, two students give their perspective on the presence of the National Guard on the campus of Kent State University. They also provide their interpretation, based on personal experience, of the right to or cost of student activism as well as what the presence of the National Guard symbolized given the time period and climate of the country and campus.

### CONTEXT AND CONNECTIONS

*United States Invasion of Cambodia* was a military strategy to flush out Vietcong headquarters in order to win or take control over the situation in Cambodia. War had appeared to be winding down after increased public outcry (as a direct response to the My Lai Massacre) and invasion of Cambodia was in direct contrast to what the average American citizen wanted in relationship to United States involvement in the Vietnam War. Protests across the country as well as at Kent State University occur.

*First Amendment* (United States Constitution) provides for the freedom of speech and assembly.

*The Riot Act* is read to disperse people from downtown Kent bars after Kent Mayor Leroy Satrom declared a “state of emergency.” The State of Emergency was reported to be in response to protests and general unrest (spontaneous anti-war protests, vandalism of downtown businesses, blocked traffic, aggressive behavior toward law enforcement, bonfire set) in downtown Kent. Origins of a “riot act” are from Great Britain, which gave authorities the right to declare the unlawful gathering of twelve or more people as unlawful and to assign punitive measures. The Riot Act was said to have been adopted by the United States in the late 1800s.

*Black United Students* was a Black student organization established on the campus of Kent State University

in 1968 to address the concerns of Black students and demand the establishment of a Black Studies Program on campus.

*The Black Panther Party* was organized in 1967 in Oakland, California. Considered a militant organization, during the Civil Rights Movement, that illuminated the role of the police in black communities (police brutality and racial profiling) and called for self-defense of one’s home and community. The Black Panther Party also organized cooperatives while providing services such as food, clothing, education and legal services to the black and poor communities in urban cities across the United States.

*Teamster Strike* took place in Akron, Ohio, and resulted in the National Guard being called in to protect residents and strikebreakers from Teamsters (union members) who were reportedly armed.

### INITIAL UNDERSTANDING

1. What is the significance of the following to the scene you have just read: The United States invasion of Cambodia, First Amendment, The Riot Act, Black United Students, The Black Panther Party, 1970 Teamster Strike (Akron, Ohio).
2. Read transcripts or listen to interviews of individual recollections of the May 4th shootings. Identify their perspectives regarding the following: presence of National Guard (student, KSU Administration, City of Kent community members), safety concerns, campus climate (political, social/racial).

### INTERPRETATION

1. How did the climate of the country and local events affect or precipitate the shootings at Kent State University?
2. How did personal experiences, education and race

influence the perspectives of students in regards to the presence of the National Guard on the campus of Kent State University?

3. How were the reactions of students, campus officials, law enforcement/National Guard, and Kent residents influenced by differing perspectives on the war in Vietnam and the right to freedom of speech and peaceable assembly?

### REFLECTION

1. In scene four, Male Student 1 commented, “I can’t believe somebody didn’t have the anticipatory skills to read that one.” Given the climate of the country and the most recent assignment of the National Guard dispatched to Kent State University, how could university officials have better anticipated student and National Guard reactions to one another possibly averting the shootings?
2. Why might have Male Student 2 found the moments prior to the shootings “surreal?”

### EXTENDED RESPONSE WRITING PROMPTS

1. In scene four, Male Student 1 challenges his Abnormal Psychology instructor for “[holding] class with-

out referencing the fact that there was a National Guard member standing at our doorway holding an M-1.” What obligation do educators have to address or discuss current, yet controversial, topics within their classrooms to help or allow students process “real world” scenarios within the context of class content?

2. Write a dialogue between a member of Black United Students and one of their parents regarding the presence of the National Guard on the campus of Kent State University. Considering the climate of the country and campus, what commentary, suggestions, and cautions might be offered between the two?

### SCENE SPECIFIC CROSS-CURRICULAR PROJECT CONNECTIONS

*Music Connection*—Analyze musical references to May 4th shootings and create a collage or other visual representation of the varying reactions to the shootings.

*Historical Connection*—Research, compare and contrast the climate (politically, socially and racially) on college campuses across Ohio.



Students gather at a rally to protest the presence of the National Guard. Photo by Mathias Peralta. Courtesy KSU Wick Poetry Center.

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