

**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 EIGHT: GETTING IN THE WAY OF BULLETS

## Grand Jury and FBI Investigation

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### SYNOPSIS

FBI agents arrive at the Erwin home in Kent, Ohio, asking to interview Matthew Erwin, who turns out to be a six-year-old boy. Their intended person of interest is not Matthew but Michael Erwin, Matthew's eldest brother. Michael recalls how the agents seemed intent on finding a source to blame for the violence, and how their focus landed on him. It started with the agents questioning him that day but continued beyond that, from him being stopped by local police officers while driving to having insults shouted at him in the courthouse in front of the Grand Jury. This scene shows the fallout from the shootings resulting in questioning, accusations of communism, poorly disguised FBI agents and 25 Grand Jury indictments, none of which would include National Guardsmen or their superiors.

### CONTEXT AND CONNECTIONS

*FBI* (Federal Bureau of Investigation) is a government law enforcement agency whose focus is to “protect and defend the United States against terrorist and foreign intelligence threats, to uphold and enforce the criminal laws of the United States, and to provide leadership and criminal justice services to federal, state, municipal, and international agencies and partners.”

*Grand Jury* is a group of jurors whose job it is to decide if someone should be charged with a crime.

*Attorney General* is the main legal advisor to the government in a specified jurisdiction.

*Jefferson Airplane* was an American psychedelic rock band of the 1960s and early 1970s.

### INITIAL UNDERSTANDING

1. What is a “hippie”?
2. What does it mean to be indicted?
3. What does it mean to exonerate?

### INTERPRETATION

1. Why would it matter who played at homecoming?
2. What does Male Student 2 mean when he says, “they were setting the stage for a whitewash” (37)?

### REFLECTION

1. What was the atmosphere in Kent during the days immediately following May 4th, 1970?
2. What is reasonable, or not, about the FBI agents' questioning of Michael Erwin?

### EXTENDED RESPONSE WRITING PROMPTS

1. Explain why, in the context of the setting, the agent at the courthouse commented on the appearance of Male Student 1.
2. Explain the scene at the Portage County Courthouse from the point of view of a Grand Jury member or courthouse employee.
3. Retell the opening events of this scene from the point of view of Matthew Erwin 10 or 20 years after the fact.

### SCENE SPECIFIC CROSS-CURRICULAR PROJECT CONNECTION

*Historical Connection*—Research the indictment of the Kent 25. What did this indictment say about the motives of those bringing the case to court?

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