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Making Meaning of May 4 **K-12 Teaching Plan**

Name of Educator: Michael J. Denman

Educator's Teaching Plan Number & Title: Project 23, "Kent State Tragedy Time Capsule"

Level of Students for Educator's Teaching Plan: 11-12 grades

Subject Area for Educator's Teaching Plan: United States History

Educator's State: California

Description of Educator's Teaching Plan: Students collaborate on a time capsule recounting the May 4 story. Highly visual, interactive contents include their original poem, art, interpretations, along with political speeches, audio, and realia such as clothing, protest signs, news articles.

This educational teaching plan was developed during Kent State University's Summer 2021 workshop titled Making Meaning of May 4: The 1970 Kent State Shootings in US History. The workshop was supported by Kent State and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grant program titled *Landmarks of American History and Culture: Workshops for School Teachers*.

This teaching plan is shared to promote understanding of the Kent State shootings on May 4, 1970; enhance humanities education across the disciplines; and illustrate the meaning of May 4 for today.

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The Kent State Tragedy Time Capsule

Background

For many older Americans, Monday, May 4 1970 is known as the “day the war came home”. For seven long years, the United States had been embroiled in a war to prevent the spread of communism in Vietnam. The fighting had been brutal with a tremendous loss of life on both sides. The government even implemented a draft that forced young men from across the country to leave home and join the fight in Southeast Asia. Many of them never knew if they would ever return home.



When Richard Nixon was elected president in 1968, he promised to bring an end to the fighting in Vietnam. Instead of “peace with honor”, however, President Nixon seemed to expand the war when he ordered the bombing of Cambodia, a country next to Vietnam accused of providing illicit support for the communist North Vietnamese. For many, this decision was not aimed at bringing about peace, but rather was seen as an unwarranted

expansion of the war.

On college campuses across the country, Nixon’s decision sparked an immediate uproar. If the war continued, they too might be called up for military service. Far too many brothers, boyfriends, and sons had already died in the quagmire of Vietnam. No one wanted to be next. From UC Berkeley to Columbia University in New York, students organized gatherings to show resistance to the Nixon administration’s new policy.

The Tragedy

On Friday, May 1 Kent State students gathered in front of their victory bell on the campus commons for the purpose of burying the United States Constitution. Their symbolic gesture was meant to let the world know that in their eyes, Nixon had “violated our constitutional rights by invading a sovereign nation without a declaration of war by Congress”.

While this gathering ended peacefully, the same cannot be said for the things which occurred during the weekend. In downtown Kent on Friday night, Kent students engaged in vandalism by smashing windows and setting trash cans on fire. The following night, an ROTC building on the Kent State campus was burned to the ground. Concerned about things spinning even further out

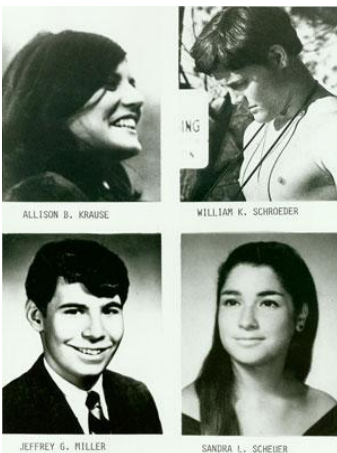
of control, town officials asked Ohio governor Jame Rhodes to call out the National Guard to restore order. Troops arrived, flooding the downtown area and the Kent State campus itself. Tensions were high.

On Monday at noon, a crowd of approximately 3,000 students had gathered once again in front of the victory bell. Their demands were clear. They wanted the National Guard removed from campus and they wanted an end to the Vietnam War.

Declaring the assembly illegal, the National Guard told students to disperse. When the students failed to do so, troops began firing tear gas and chasing the scattered students up a rise next to Taylor Hall and down an embankment known as Blanket Hill. Finding themselves suddenly trapped on a practice football field, a group of soldiers huddled while students hurled insults and rocks at the soldiers. After about ten minutes, the Guard began retracing their path back up Blanket Hill. Many students assumed the “excitement” was over for the day and that the National Guard was returning to their base of operations. They were wrong.

[Image - KENT STATE SHOOTINGS map with May 4 graphics and photos]

As the 70 men of Company G arrived at the top of Blanket Hill, they turned in unison and began firing their weapons. In just 13 terrible seconds, four college students were fatally shot and nine more were seriously wounded. It was an event which rocked America to its core and revealed the deep divisions in our society between those who supported the war effort and those who saw it as folly.



Students: Your Task

For many years, university and town officials hoped that the May 4 calamity would be forgotten. This was to change however with the election of new Kent mayor, ----- . A former history teacher, ----- told his constituents “There are far too many lessons to be learned from the events of May 4, 1970. We must capture and preserve this story before it is lost to the passage of time”.

Using his mayoral powers, ----- has appointed you and your fellow archivists an important task--you are to build and assemble a time capsule which tells the Kent State story.

“Your work must capture the divisions of American society in 1970, explain the tragic events of the day and spell out some of the lessons we should take into our hearts and minds. The capsule should show a diversity of perspectives but illustrate some enduring truths too.”

The capsule will be buried in front of City Hall and opened at the 100th anniversary in 2070.

The Nitty-Gritty Details

- 1) Each group will be given one box to fill with no more than 10 items and should be a mixture of primary and secondary sources.
- 2) Your box should be decorated with images and text that let future generations know about the contents of the capsule.
- 3) No more than 500 words of text of your creation can be placed in the box. Like a great museum exhibit, your time capsule should be highly visual and interactive.
- 4) Mayor ----- has provided a list of item categories that must go inside the time capsule and another list of potential items. YOU must decide as a group what items make the most sense to include. The categories are:

Mandatory Items	Examples
An original student poem about May 4, 1970 from YOUR group	https://bit.ly/3d9y21o
An original piece of art inspired by the Kent State shooting from YOUR group	https://www.makeitmissoula.com/2014/07/helen-mcauslan-the-kent-state-paintings/
Student interpretation of not more than 500 words that accompany the items.	See handout
Optional Items to Consider for Inclusion	
Photographs	http://100photos.time.com/photos/john-paul-fil-o-kent-state-shootings#photograph
Eyewitness testimonials	https://www.library.kent.edu/special-collections-and-archives/lorrie-j-accettola-personal-narrative
Political Cartoons	
Music Recordings	
Interviews/Eyewitness Accounts	

Political Speeches	https://omeka.library.kent.edu/special-collections/items/show/6234
Realia such as clothing, shell casings, letters, political flyers, protest signs, newspaper articles, etc.	https://libcom.org/gallery/kent-state-shooting-protests-posters
Audio Recordings of the shooting	https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=9946806

Due Date: April 9, 2021

Teacher Handout

Teacher Notes:

- 1) Students will be working in groups of 4-5 with one box to share.
- 2) This activity will take approximately two weeks to complete for schools on a block schedule:

Week 1	<p>Teacher PowerPoint on Vietnam War and Kent State</p> <p>Documentary Film: Four Dead in Ohio https://youtu.be/TdCpl2qdsd8</p> <p>Lesson Review: Primary vs. Secondary Sources</p>
Week 2	<p>Groups are formed and given one cardboard box.</p> <p>Teacher Lesson: How to Analyze Sources--SCIM-C http://www.historicalinquiry.com/</p> <p>Students spend the week researching and selecting items for the capsule.</p>
Week 3	Presentation of time capsules to the entire class.

Kent State Item Tag



A vertical rectangular tag with a black border and a small circle at the top center for a hole. The text "We chose this item because..." is printed near the top. Below the text are ten horizontal lines for writing.

We chose this item because...



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Time Capsule Lesson Endnotes

Klein, C. (n.d.). *Nixon Holds Press Conference, Talks to Students*. How Nixon's Presidency Became Increasingly Erratic After Kent State. [www.history.com](https://www.history.com/news/richard-nixon-kent-state-shootings-response).
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<https://www.library.kent.edu/special-collections-and-archives/may-1-students-bury-constitution>.

Wallenfeldt, J. (2021, April 27). *May 4: Kent State Shooting 1970 American History*. Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Kent-State-shootings/May-4>.

Richard. (2020, May 4). *Four Students Were Killed in Ohio. America Was Never the Same*. The New York Times.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/04/opinion/kent-state-shooting-protest.html>.