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

Name of Educator: Michael Sullivan

Educator's Teaching Plan Number & Title: Project 12, "Film class unit plan"

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

Subject Area for Educator's Teaching Plan: English/Film studies

Educator's State: Illinois

Description of Educator's Teaching Plan: To begin, students evaluate scenarios detailing civil disobedience and consider which action was most admirable or most fitting or required a better response. Vietnam era film study includes live script reading of *Remember My Lai*. Understanding that they're hearing varying perspectives on the massacre, students proceed from My Lai to May 4 and each sharing striking lines from an oral history of May 4 and connect their cumulative understanding to striking Vietnam veteran artwork.

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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Making Meaning of May 4th: The 1970 Shootings in U.S. History Unit Plan

This unit will be taught in a junior/senior level elective film class. The unit will focus on various voices and perspectives from the period surrounding the Kent State massacre. The opening activity requires students to evaluate scenarios detailing civil disobedience and protest. The content will shift to the Vietnam War era with documentary and fictional film, still photography, readings (including oral history), and Vietnam veteran artwork. Students will read, write, view, discuss, and interpret material that would have the author(s) of the Illinois state learning standards doing backflips. The films themselves are required materials along with the ability to project the artwork power point presentation.

As an aside, we were asked how we would share material with colleagues. Outside of this unit, I see a natural pairing for May 4 material with "The Laramie Project," which is required reading in our English 10 Honors class. The play uses the actual words of real people (oral history), details a hate crime, and is set on a college campus experiencing protests and counter protests where there is a tension between college students and local residents. I'll be including May 4 material in my English 10 Honors sections and will encourage my co-teacher to do the same.

Day one - civil disobedience scenarios – students will complete the following activity that will get them to think and write about as well as discuss issues related to civil disobedience and protest.

Finding your Voice scenarios

Please read the seven scenarios below. In each case, the person faces a difficult situation. Each person takes an **action** that gives voice to their feelings. Your job will be to evaluate the **actions** taken in the context of the overall situation described. In each scenario, the person's action is **set off in bold**. Some scenarios describe more than one **action** taken by the individual.

After reading each scenario, write a short reaction to each in your journal. Feel free to use the following questions to guide your responses: how do you feel about the action taken in the scenario? Would you have reacted similarly? Was the action appropriate for the situation described?

1. Terri is a teenage girl who is very concerned about the impact climate change is having on the environment. She is a member of the students for a better environment club at school, but to her that hardly seems like doing anything. She spends a good amount of time reading internet articles with ominous predictions about the fate of the earth. The predictions are growing more troubling. Her mom tells Terri that it's not her job to save the world, but Terri has had enough. **One night she sneaks out of the house and spray**

paints **CLIMATE CHANGE IS REAL** on each of the three gas station buildings in her town.

2. Jamie is a transgender student who was born male but identifies as female. Jamie would like to use the bathroom of their choice, but their school currently does not allow that. **They have the idea to start a petition for students to sign encouraging the school to change its bathroom policy.** Jamie is successful in securing many signatures on the petition; however, they also face ridicule from a group of boys who have bullied them in the past. On the one hand, Jamie feels uplifted by the support of fellow students who signed the petition, but on the other, they feel anger at the continued harassment from the group of boys. **On the same day Jamie submits the petition to the principal, they feel unable to hold back and confront one of the boys in the school cafeteria. After screaming obscenities at him in front of everyone, Jamie is taken to the dean and reprimanded.**
3. Glenn is a high school junior. He is an honor roll student who is a member of the cross country team and works a part-time job at the local hardware store. Partway through the semester in his history class, Glenn concludes that not only do his views not jive with the teacher's but that neither the teacher nor his classmates are open to views he expresses. Glenn comes from a very conservative family, and his parents have warned him to not let his teachers indoctrinate him with their beliefs. **Glenn decides that he will no longer participate in class discussions. When asked a question by the teacher, Glenn doesn't respond, and when pressed simply shakes his head.** After a few times, the teacher stops calling on Glenn, who hasn't told anyone why he isn't participating despite a suggestion from a friend that he write SILENCED on a piece of white athletic tape and place it across his mouth when he goes to class. Glenn rejects that idea. He silently completes the semester. While class participation is not a major portion of the grade, he does lose enough points to drop his grade from an A to a B.
4. Larry Donaldson is a community organizer in a major American city. His organization NAG (Neighborhood Action Group) has become increasingly concerned about a factory, run by a major corporation, that has had a history of polluting. Over the years, the company has been fined but has simply put "band aids" on the problem to gain temporary compliance rather than overhauling and modernizing their emissions equipment. Larry and his organization have lobbied city council members unsuccessfully to get their help in putting pressure on the company. Additionally, they have contacted the corporation but not made any progress in getting it to clean up its practices. Frustrated with the lack of progress, Larry and members of NAG draft a list of demands they want the corporation to address including: investing in emission reducing technology at the local factory, requiring the company to meet on a quarterly basis with members of the community to address any concerns, and a commitment from the company to pay their employees a living wage. **Larry travels to the annual company shareholder meeting with other NAG members and leads a protest outside before walking into the meeting during the CEO's**

address. Larry leads a number of protestors down the center aisle and delivers their list of demands to the CEO.

5. Tonya is a young woman coming home from having met friends for dinner. As she walks back to her apartment, Tonya encounters a police action in progress. While she did not see the start of the incident, she surmises that it is a traffic stop gone wrong. There is a car pulled to the curbside with its driver's side door open and two squad cars parked behind. A handcuffed young man is being pinned down by a police officer on the sidewalk. Tonya immediately believes that the officer is using excessive force, **so she takes out her smartphone and begins videotaping.** When one of the police officers sees her videotaping, he points at Tonya and orders her to stop recording. **Tonya takes a step backward and states that she is within her rights while continuing to record.** Two police officers lift the young man from the ground by his elbows and roughly put him in the back of the police car. **Tonya continues her recording until the police car departs, and when she gets home, she posts her video on multiple social media platforms along with her interpretation of what happened.**
6. Jon is a twenty-three-year old combat veteran. He volunteered to join the service and was one hundred percent behind the decision to go to war and willing to be deployed overseas. Jon was wounded in action. As a result, he is paralyzed from the waist down. Since returning home, Jon's attitude toward our involvement in the war has evolved. He no longer supports the war. Recently, he learned that one of his good friends and fellow soldiers was killed in action. He decides that he has to take action to try to prevent others from joining the service and being wounded or killed. **With the help of a friend, Jon travels to a nearby army recruiting office and chains himself to the front door so that no one will be able to gain access.** He hopes his action will draw media attention and give voice to his anti-war message.
7. Valerie has been on her high school newspaper staff for two years. She also is an active member of several other school clubs and activities. She enjoys the laid back atmosphere of working on the paper. The faculty sponsor has always been open to student suggestions for story ideas. However, when Valerie pitches a story about the lack of black faculty members and underrepresentation of people of color across the curriculum, the advisor gives her a hard no. He indicates that the principal would not be happy and further states, "I have a mortgage to pay." Valerie stews for a few weeks before coming up with a solution. She approaches a few friends with the idea of starting an unauthorized, underground newspaper. She assures them that they can write what they want about the school, teachers, and their classmates. **Soon the first edition is published containing Valerie's article that was turned down by the official school newspaper along with several articles that attack other school policies and faculty members.**

After students have had time to read and provide their written responses, they will be assigned to a group with three other students to discuss the assignment. Students will address the questions

listed below with a student assigned to record and share insights from their discussion with the class.

Group questions

1. Which reaction did you find most admirable? Why?
 2. Which reaction best fit the scope of the situation the person was facing?
 3. For those scenarios where you disagreed with the reaction, what would have been a better response to have that person's voice be heard?
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After this timed group activity, there will be a wrap up whole class discussion.

Day two - background on Vietnam War and pre-notes for "Remember My Lai", begin viewing

Day three - "Remember My Lai" conclusion and discussion

Focus on various voices/points of view on the massacre - students will perform a close reading of the film transcript to provide examples of varying perspectives on the massacre. Here are some suggested people/quotations that may be included:

1. Kenneth Hodges - A sergeant who trained the men of Charlie Company: "I feel that we carried out the orders in a moral fashion and the orders of, of destroying the village, of killing the people in the village. I feel that we carried out our orders, and I feel that we did not violate any moral standards."
2. Varnardo Simpson - A soldier who killed multiple villagers and has tried to commit suicide three times: "Yes, I'm ashamed, I'm sorry, I'm guilty, but I did it. You know what, what else can I tell you? It happened. You're looking at someone that did, it can happen if you go to war. Those are the type of things will happen and can happen to anyone. After they train you, they program you. It can happen, it happens, that 's reality. That's what war is. War's not something that I shoot at you, you shoot at me. Well we take time out, you know, well don't shoot me here, don't shoot me there. War is war, it's killing all type of ways and that's why we don't need another war."
3. Harry Stanley - A soldier who refused the order to shoot villagers: "Lieutenant Calley ordered certain people to shoot these people and I was one of them. And I refused and he told me that he was going to have me a court-martial when we got back to base camp, and I told him what was on my mind at the time. Ordering me to shoot down innocent people, that's not an order, that's, that's craziness with me, you know, and so I don't feel like I have to obey that."
4. Hugh Thompson - A helicopter pilot who instructed his troops to fire on fellow Americans if they fired at anymore Vietnamese: "When I did instruct my crew, my crew chief and gunner, you know, to open up on them if they opened up on any more civilians, I don't know, I don't know how I would have felt if they would have opened up on them, but that

particular day I wouldn't have given it a second thought. It's, they were the enemy at that time, I guess. They were damn sure the enemy to the people on the ground."

5. Sa Thi Qui - a Vietnamese villager: "Tiny children crawling along the edge of the ditch, it broke your heart. I thought I was going to die. I couldn't breathe. I was injured so I crawled back home. Over there was a naked woman who had been raped and a virgin girl with her vagina slit open. We don't know why they behaved like that."
6. Pham Thi Trinh - a Vietnamese villager: "I looked out of the house and saw my sister, Mui. She was fourteen that year. An American was pressing on top of her, she had no clothing on her. At the time I didn't understand what that meant. My sister was trying to resist him. Afterwards the American got up, he put his clothes on, and then he shot her."
7. Ron Haeberle - photographer who took photo that later appeared in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*: "Ok, I took the photograph, I thought they were just going to question the people, but just as soon as I turned and walked away, I heard firing, I looked around and over the corner of my shoulder I saw the people drop. I just kept on walking. At the time I was just, you know, capturing a reaction, but when you look at it later on in life, you know, now that those people are dead, they were shot, it's just kind of an eerie type feeling that you, that goes over, you know, goes through your whole body and you think back, could I have prevented this? How could I have prevented this? And it's a question I still kind of, you know, ask myself today."

Day four - Three photos discussion on how images can sway public opinion (My Lai photo, Kent State iconic photo, and "Napalm Girl" photo) the photos will be used in conjunction with Kent State lecture/video clips/ readings/ background (exact material TBD as I digest all I've learned and format it in a way to engage students)

Day five – introduction to the Kent State May 4 archive and oral history assignment (background discussion regarding memory and anonymous submissions) – each student is assigned an oral history to read in order to share that person's perspective the next day – students will specifically select line(s) that speak to them or they feel best encapsulate the person's viewpoint

Day six - oral history mosaic - students share striking line from their oral history and guided discussion where students hopefully make connections between points made in the various oral histories/ *Coming Home* (Hal Ashby) notes

Day seven through nine - Viewing *Coming Home*

Day ten - Post film discussion/ journal entry - focus on various voices in the film regarding war and protest (veterans, a military recruiter, disabled veterans, wives and sisters of soldiers) with linkage back to scenarios and "Remember My Lai"

Day eleven - Artwork of Vietnam Veterans - another avenue for having your voice heard Throughout presentation students encouraged to make connections between the artwork and/or veterans' narratives and all previous class material/discussions

Art from the Vietnam Experience

[View art at National Veterans Art Museum, NVAM Collection Online:
<http://collection.nvam.org/>]