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

Name of Educator: Amy Lively

Educator's Teaching Plan Number & Title: Project 48, "Rhetoric of the Kent State Shootings"

Level of Students for Educator's Teaching Plan: 9-12 grades

Subject Area for Educator's Teaching Plan: US history, American literature

Educator's State: Arizona

Description of Educator's Teaching Plan: Study begins with rhetorical analysis of Vietnam-era political speech and cartoons; printed accounts of May 4; and "Ohio." Students then practice the power of music to persuade by composing a protest song.

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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Kent State Project Presentation

This project was written for a humane letters class, which merges US history with American literature. In it, students will study the rhetoric of May 4, which undoubtedly played a role in the events of that day. However, the students will also look at the rhetoric of song and the healing power of music. Their primary assessment is to write a protest song about an issue of their choosing.

- The project takes a chronological approach and begins by doing a rhetorical analysis of remarks made by Vice-President Spiro Agnew on the National Moratorium in October 1969, President Richard Nixon in his announcement about the invasion of Cambodia on April 30, 1970, and the remarks of Ohio Governor James Rhodes on May 3, 1970.
- Students will learn about the history of May 4, focusing on the timeline of events of the prior weekend, leading up to shootings on May 4. They will use many of the resources shared with educators this week, including maps and photographs.
- Students will examine the rhetoric in opposing newspaper and magazine articles written about the shootings. They will also study “visual rhetoric” in two political cartoons, each presenting a differing perspective on May 4.
- Students will learn about the power of music and, specifically, how the song, “Ohio,” by Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young spoke up for the students when so few people would at that time. I also encourage educators who have the time to provide a sample of songs that were important to Kent State students in 1969-1970, such as “Street Fighting Man,” “For What It’s Worth,” and “Fortunate Son.”
- The project will culminate in the presentation of their original songs. Using a graphic organizer, students will research their topic, write five facts on their topic, and use that information to write four lines of verse and four lines of chorus. Students will be asked to read the lyrics, or, if they choose, to sing their songs.

LESSON: The Rhetoric of the Kent State Shootings

GRADE LEVELS: 9 – 12

DURATION: 5 one-hour blocks

GUIDING QUESTIONS: How was persuasive language used to influence Americans about protestors in the Vietnam War Era? How can popular music both influence and reflect the message of societal issues? How can a song be a call to action?

PRIMARY ASSESSMENTS:

- Student-written song lyrics to a protest song
- Active participation

MATERIALS:

Speeches

“Remarks on Vietnam Moratorium Day” by Spiro Agnew (1969)

- Audio of Agnew remarks

“Cambodian Incursion Address” by Richard Nixon (1970)

“Speech on Campus Disorders in Kent” by Ohio Governor James A. Rhodes (1970)

<https://omeka.library.kent.edu/special-collections/files/pdfs/6234.pdf>

Video

“The Day the War Came Home” from Aljazeera (2010)

<https://www.aljazeera.com/videos/2010/5/5/the-day-the-war-came-home>

“How Neil Young Came to Write Ohio after Kent State” interview with Graham Nash from David Hoffman (1990)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7FzYEn_geww

Lyrics

“Ohio” by Neil Young (1970)

Political Cartoons

“End of School” political cartoon by Herblock (1970)

“This is Horrible” political cartoon by Oliphant (1970)

Other Documents

Newspaper or magazine articles on the shooting (TBD)

“Special Report: The Kent State Tragedy” by the President’s Commission on Campus Unrest (October 1970) <https://omeka.library.kent.edu/special-collections/items/show/3419>

PART ONE: Rhetoric Leading Up to May 4

The students will examine and offer a rhetorical analysis of excerpts of speeches made by President Richard Nixon, Vice-President Spiro Agnew, and Ohio Governor James Rhodes. *Note: The lesson assumes that students will have some background on the Vietnam War, at least up to 1969.*

1. As a class, take turns reading out loud from the “Cambodian Incursion Address” by Richard Nixon.
2. Allow students to break into pairs or trios to discuss/identify Nixon’s use of the three appeals (ethos/pathos/logos) and other rhetorical devices they may notice, such as anaphora.
3. Debrief with the class as a whole and discuss the following questions:
 - *Who does Nixon’s target audience seem to be?*
 - *How does Nixon build credibility for his plan?*
 - *What does Nixon want his audience to believe about Vietnam and Cambodia?*
 - *Why did Nixon include this passage? What feelings does he seem to be trying to evoke? My fellow Americans, we live in an age of anarchy, both abroad and at home. We see mindless attacks on all the great institutions which have been created by free civilizations in the last 500 years. Even here in the United States, great universities are being systematically destroyed.*
4. As a class, take turns reading out loud the excerpts of statements from Spiro Agnew’s “Remarks on Vietnam Moratorium Day” and “Speech on Campus Disorders in Kent” by James Rhodes. Discuss the following questions with the class as a whole:
 - A. Agnew remarks:
 - *What is Agnew’s criticism of college students?*
 - *Who does Agnew’s target audience seem to be?*
 - *Read this statement closely: “Education is being redefined at the demand of the uneducated to suit the ideas of the uneducated. The student now goes to college to proclaim rather than to learn. The lessons of the past are ignored and obliterated in a contemporary antagonism known as ‘The Generation Gap.’ A spirit of national masochism prevails, encouraged by an effete corps of impudent snobs who characterize themselves as intellectuals.”*
 - *Who is he referring to as “impudent snobs?”*
 - *What is the importance of the phrase “education is being redefined?”*
Redefined how?
 - *What do you think are the most powerful verbs in this statement?*

B. Rhodes remarks

- *Who does the audience for this statement seem to be?*
- *Who are “the worst type of people we harbor in America.” What type of feeling is Rhodes trying to evoke?*
- *Why does Rhodes use the words/phrases “Brown Shirts,” and “communist element?”*
- *Who might agree with his characterization of the students?*
- *How might you have felt about these statements if you had been a student at Kent State at that time? Would you have been motivated to take any action? If so, what?*

5. Discuss: What is the collective message from these three speeches/statements?

6. Explain assignment: *Some songwriters wrote protest songs about the Vietnam War, some songs were adopted by young Americans as protest anthems, and there was a very famous song written in protest of the shootings on May 4. Your assignment is to write four lines of a verse and four lines of a chorus of a protest song about an issue that is important to you. Use the graphic organizer as your guide. You will read the lyrics to your song (or sing, if you choose to do so) at the end of the week.*

PART TWO: May 4, 1970

The teacher will present a lesson on the events leading up to the National Guard arriving on the Kent State campus, as well as the shootings on May 4. This portion of the lesson can be modified to be more condensed or extended, depending on the time available.

1. Mini-Lecture: The teacher will provide a timeline of events that covers pertinent activities from May 1 - May 4. Teachers can create a timeline that is appropriate for their class using the Chronology of Events from the Kent State University Library:
<https://www.library.kent.edu/special-collections-and-archives/may-4-chronology>

The timeline should be presented with maps of the movement and locations of the students and the Ohio National Guard. Maps are provided at the end of this lesson.

2. Video: "The Day The War Came Home" <https://www.aljazeera.com/videos/2010/5/5/the-day-the-war-came-home> (21 min)

This video provides a summary of events that can be used as a stand alone resource or can be used in conjunction with other resources. Any supplemental photographs are at the discretion of the teacher, depending on the needs and maturity level of the students. A wealth of information is available from the KSU Digital Archive:
<https://omeka.library.kent.edu/special-collections/kent-state-shootings-digital-archive>

3. Discuss with the class as a whole:
 - *What are the various reasons that students were on campus on May 4? (Not all were protesting.)*
 - *For those who were protesting, what were they protesting? (The war AND the presence of the Ohio National Guard.)*
 - *If you could ask questions of the students who were protesting, what would you ask?*
 - *If you could ask questions of the members of the National Guard, what would you ask?*
 - *Based on the statements we read on Day One, what do you anticipate the reaction of the Kent community and the nation as a whole to be to this tragedy?*

PART THREE: The Reaction to May 4

The teacher will guide the students through an examination of reactions to the shootings. There is no single narrative and perspectives differ. This should provide an opportunity for a robust discussion on “truth” and why we have differing opinions and interpretations about the actions of the students and the Ohio National Guard.

1. In pairs or small groups, students will read newspaper articles that present opposing views of the shootings. ([These articles will be identified when I have more time to read and select appropriate samples.](#))
2. **OPTIONAL (depending on time available):** As a class, read excerpts of the letter that Kent State University President Robert White sent to parents on July 21, 1970: <https://omeka.library.kent.edu/special-collections/files/pdfs/4334.pdf>

Discuss with the class as a whole:

- *Does White appear to be placing blame for the shootings of May 4? If so, who does he suggest is to blame? What is your evidence?*
 - *Would the emphasis on campus security be reassuring to parents? To students?*
3. In pairs or small groups, examine two political cartoons from 1970.
 - a. “End of School” by Herblock
 - b. “This is horrible...” by Oliphant

Questions for the students to discuss in their groups:

- *What symbols are used and what do they represent?*
 - *What important words or phrases are used in either cartoon?*
 - *Do either of the artists use exaggeration? If so, how?*
 - *What does the opinion of each artist seem to be?*
4. Share this excerpt from the President’s Commission Campus Unrest, established by the Nixon Administration: “The indiscriminate firing of rifles into a crowd of students and the deaths that followed [the events leading up to the shootings] were unnecessary, unwarranted and inexcusable.”
 5. Discuss the conflicting opinions on the shootings.
 - *Why do you think so many Americans blamed the students?*
 - *Why are even basic facts about events sometimes disputed?*
 - *How can we apply “think like a historian” principles to the study of May 4?*

PART FOUR: The Music of May 4

The students will discuss the value of music as both a reflection of and an influence on society. They will learn about the importance of music to the Vietnam War Era and offer a rhetorical analysis of "Ohio." This portion of the lesson can be modified to be shorter or extended, depending on the time available. The analysis of "Ohio" is most essential.

1. The teacher will lead a discussion on the importance of music in society, perhaps drawing on what they learned about music of the Civil Rights Movement.
2. OPTIONAL: The teacher will provide the lyrics to other popular songs of the era. Here is a sample:
 - "Street Fighting Man" by the Rolling Stones (1968)
 - "Ballad of the Green Berets" by Sgt. Barry Sadler (1966)
 - "For What It's Worth" by Buffalo Springfield (1967)
 - "Fortunate Son" by Creedence Clearwater Revival (1969)
3. The class will watch an interview with Graham Nash on the writing of "Ohio."
VIDEO: "How Neil Young Came to Write Ohio after Kent State" interview with Graham Nash (1990) from David Hoffman
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7FzYEn_geww (2 min, 41 sec)
4. The teacher will pass out the lyrics to "Ohio" and guide the students in reading them before listening to the song.

Discuss the meaning/rhetorical purpose of:

- "Tin soldiers and Nixon's coming"
 - "We're finally on our own"
 - "Gotta get down to it" (Focus on the tone of this line and pair it with "should have been done long ago" -- what should have been done long ago?)
 - "What if you knew her and found her dead on the ground?"
5. Play the audio of "Ohio." (Teachers have a variety of options for accessing the audio, including streaming services and YouTube.)
 - *What is the tone of the music?*
 - *How does the tone reflect the lyrics?*
 - *Who was this song written for?*
 - *What is the purpose of this song? Is it a call to action? If so, what is the action?*
 - *Why do you think many AM radio stations, which played the popular hits as opposed to the "underground" FM radio, refused to play the song?*

PART FIVE

Students will present their song lyrics to the class. The lesson will conclude with a brief reflection paper on the value of music and, in particular, using music to develop unity for a cause.

1. Each student will briefly explain the issue they are protesting, why it is important, and either read or sing their song lyrics.
2. The teacher will collect the graphic organizer after the presentations.
3. Exit Ticket: Students will write a two-paragraph reflection paper on what they learned about the value of music as a form of protest and unity. They are also free to address any challenges they encountered in completing the assignment.

Writing a Protest Song (Graphic Organizer)

Name: _____

Assignment: Building on the tradition of using music to show unity, your assignment is to write a protest song about an issue or event that is important to you. **You will need to write four lines of verse and four lines of a chorus.** You may write for any genre of music. Be prepared to turn in this worksheet AND read or sing your song on ____ (date)_____.

1. What issue or event do you want to address in your song?
2. Why is your topic important?
3. Research your topic. From your research, write down 5 facts related to your topic and where you found each fact.

SONG TITLE:

IF YOUR SONG IS BASED ON THE MELODY OF ANOTHER SONG: WRITE THAT SONG TITLE HERE:

VERSE (4 lines)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

CHORUS (4 lines)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Remarks on Vietnam Moratorium Day (Excerpts)
Vice-President Spiro Agnew, October 19, 1969
New Orleans, Louisiana

Sometimes it appears that we're reaching a period when our senses and our minds will no longer respond to moderate stimulation. We seem to be reaching an age of the gross, persuasion through speeches and books is too often discarded for disruptive demonstrations aimed at bludgeoning the unconvinced into action.

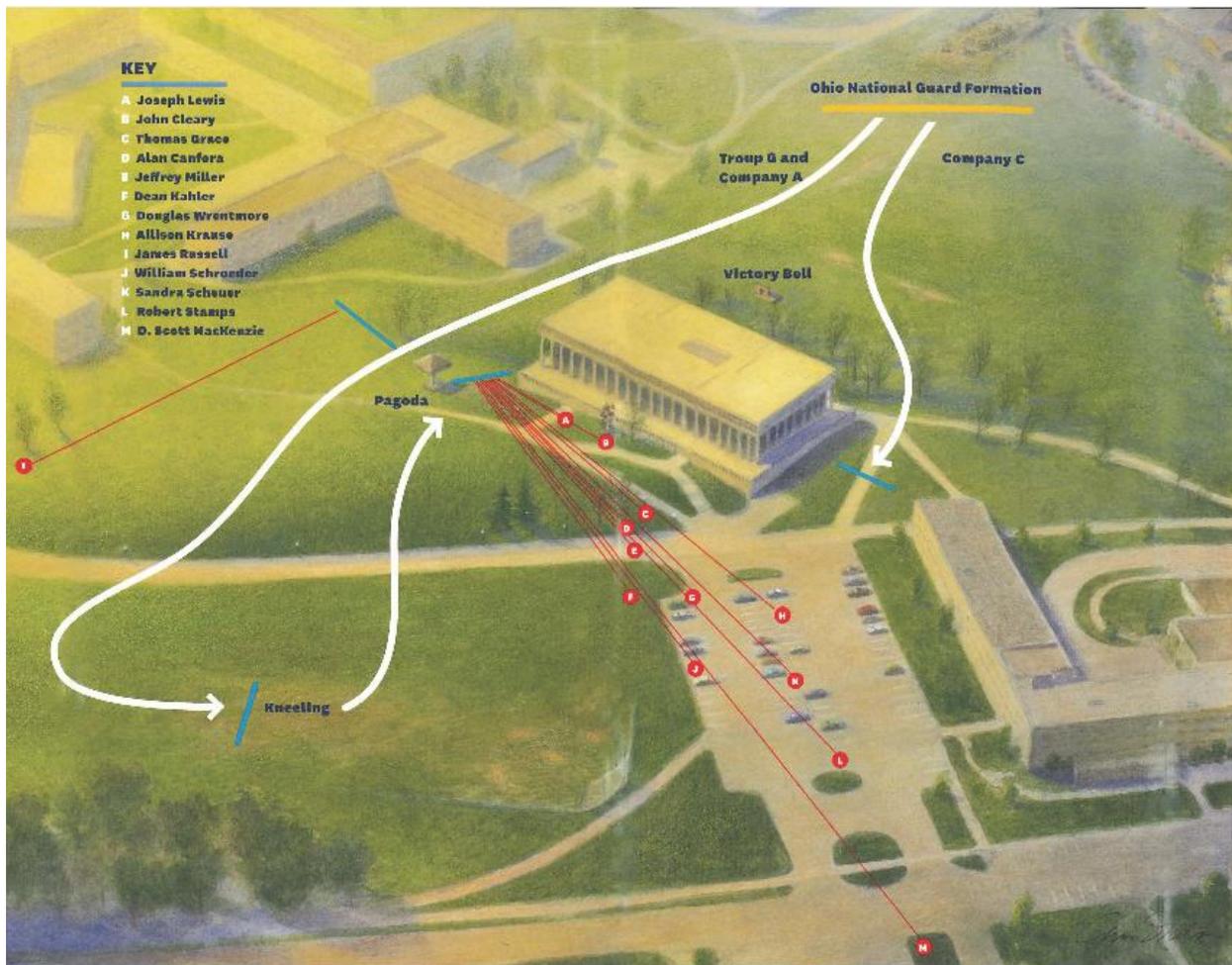
The young--and by this I don't mean any stretch of the imagination all the young, but I'm talking about those who claim to speak for the young--at the zenith of physical power and sensitivity, overwhelm themselves with drugs and artificial stimulants. Subtlety is lost, and fine distinctions based on acute reasoning are carelessly ignored in a headlong jump to a predetermined conclusion.

Life is visceral rather than intellectual. And the most visceral practitioners of life are those who characterize themselves as intellectuals. Truth is to them revealed rather than logically proved. And the principal infatuations of today revolve around the social sciences, those subjects which can accommodate any opinion, and about which the most reckless conjecture cannot be discredited. Education is being redefined at the demand of the uneducated to suit the ideas of the uneducated. The student now goes to college to proclaim, rather than to learn. The lessons of the past are ignored and obliterated, and a contemporary antagonism known as "The Generation Gap." A spirit of national masochism prevails, encouraged by an effete corps of impudent snobs who characterize themselves as intellectuals.

Source: <https://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/agnew-denounces-student-movement-video>

**[Cambodian Incursion Address (Excerpts)
President Richard Nixon, April 30, 1970
Washington, D.C.]**

SOURCE: American Rhetoric
<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/richardnixoncambodia.html>



Map of troop movement and location of student casualties
 Source: Kent State University May 4 Visitors Center



Kent State University May 4 Visitors Center

[Political cartoon regarding the Kent State shootings, by Oliphant]

[Political cartoon - "End of School"]

Source: Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2012638204/>

["Ohio", lyrics by Neil Young (1970)]