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May 4th Voices: Kent State, 1970

David Hassler

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Eyewitness testimony brought to life through verbatim theater

On May 4, 1970, National Guardsmen occupying the Kent State University campus fired 67 shots in 13 seconds, leaving four students dead. This tragedy had a profound impact on Northeast Ohio and the nation and is credited as a catalyst in changing Americans' views toward U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Supported by the Ohio Humanities Council, *May 4th Voices* was originally written and performed as part of a community arts project for the 40th commemoration of the events of May 4th.

The text of David Hassler's play is based on the Kent State Shootings Oral History Project, begun in 1990 by Sandra Halem and housed in Kent State University Libraries' Department of Special Collections and Archives. The collection is comprised of over 110 interviews, with first-person narratives and personal reactions to the events of May 4, 1970, from the viewpoints of members of the Kent community; Kent State faculty, students, alumni, staff, and administrators who were on campus that day; and National Guardsmen, police, hospital personnel, and others whose lives were affected by their experience. Weaving these voices and stories together anonymously, Hassler's play tells the human story of May 4th and its aftermath, capturing the sense of trauma, confusion, and fear felt by all people regardless of where they stood that day.

Directed by Katherine Burke, *May 4th Voices* premiered on May 2, 2010, on the Kent State University campus. It offered the Kent community an opportunity to take ownership of its own tragic story and engage in a creative, healing dialogue. Now, with the publication of the play and its accompanying teacher's guide and DVD, *May 4th Voices* brings to a national audience the emotional truth of this tragedy, connecting it to the larger issues of war, conflict, and trauma. A powerful work of testimony, *May 4th Voices* offers a new and unique contribution to the literature of the protest movement and the Vietnam era.

**See also the *May 4th Voices* DVD (ISBN 978-1-60635-187-1) and *A Teacher's Resource Book* for May 4th Voices (ISBN 978-1-60635-166-6).

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