



ERIN GRUWELL
EDUCATOR & CATALYST FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Erin Gruwell has earned an award-winning reputation for her steadfast commitment to the future of education. Her impact as a change agent runs deep. So deep, in fact, that her story attracted Hollywood's attention. In January 2007, Paramount Pictures released *Freedom Writers*, starring two-time Oscar winner Hilary Swank as Gruwell. The film is based on *The Freedom Writers Diary*, *The New York Times* bestseller that chronicled Gruwell's extraordinary journey with 150 high school students who had been written off by the education system

By fostering an educational philosophy that valued and promoted diversity, she transformed her students' lives. She encouraged them to re-think rigid beliefs about themselves and others, reconsider daily decisions, and ultimately re-chart their futures. With Gruwell's support, they chose to forego teenage pregnancy, drugs, and violence to become aspiring college students, published writers, and citizens for change. They dubbed themselves the "Freedom Writers" –in homage to civil rights activists The Freedom Riders—and published a book.

Inspired by Anne Frank, Gruwell and her students captured their collective journey in *The Freedom Writers Diary*. Through poignant student entries and Gruwell's narrative text, the book records their "eye-opening, spirit-raising odyssey against intolerance and misunderstanding." In early 2007, *Teach with Your Heart*, Gruwell's powerful memoir and call to arms was published.

While Gruwell has been credited with giving her students a "second chance", it was perhaps she who changed the most during her tenure at Wilson High School. She decided to channel her classroom experiences toward a broader cause, and today her impact as a teacher extends well beyond Room 203. She founded the Freedom Writers Foundation where she currently teaches teachers around the country how to implement her innovative lesson plans into their own classrooms. Recently, Gruwell's teaching methods from her time in Room 203 have been published in the *Freedom Writers Diary Teacher's Guide*. Proceeds from the sale of all books directly fund the Freedom Writers Foundation.

Gruwell and her students have appeared on numerous television shows, including *Oprah*, *Prime Time Live with Connie Chung*, *The View*, and *Good Morning America*, to name a few. Their story has earned them dozens of awards, including the Spirit of Anne Frank Award.

Gruwell is a graduate of the University of California Irvine, where she received the Lauds and Laurels Distinguished Alumni Award. She earned her Master's Degree and teaching credentials from California State University Long Beach, where she was honored as Distinguished Alumna by the School of Education.

TOPICS:

- Becoming A Catalyst For Change
- Teaching Tolerance
- Nurturing the Leader Within