

Erin Gruwell

Educator and Founder of the Freedom Writers Foundation

Please contact a GDA agent for information.

Topics

- Activism/Philanthropy/Civic Engagement
- Diversity & Inclusion
- Education
- Family & Children
- Generational Issues

About Erin Gruwell

Erin Gruwell is a teacher, an author, and an activist who has been fighting for social justice for over two decades. She first gained national attention in 1998 when she and her 150 students appeared on an ABC special—*PrimeTime Live*—with Connie Chung.

Erin's students - affectionately called the Freedom Writers - came from backgrounds of poverty, gangs, and violence, and many were at-risk of dropping out of school due to the school-to-prison-pipeline. But, under Erin's guidance, all 150 Freedom Writers graduated from high school and pursued higher education.

In 1999, Erin and the Freedom Writers published their book, *The Freedom Writers Diary*, which detailed their unique journey from hardship to hope. The book became a #1 *New York Times* bestseller and was adapted into a major motion picture, *Freedom Writers*, starring two-time Academy Award-winner Hilary Swank as Erin. The film brought Erin's work to an even wider audience, and she has since used her platform to continue her fight for equity and inclusion with her non-profit, the Freedom Writers Foundation.

Erin's work has been recognized with several humanitarian awards, including the prestigious *Spirit of Anne Frank Award*. Erin and the Freedom Writers have appeared on multiple television shows to promote educational reform, including *Oprah*, *The View*, *Good Morning America*, and NBC's *TODAY*. They have also been featured on *National Public Radio*, numerous newspapers, and national magazines, such as *People*. In 2019, Erin and the Freedom Writers were the subjects of the Emmy Award-winning PBS documentary *Freedom Writers: Stories from the Heart*. Erin also hosts *The Freedom Writers Podcast* with guests who are authors, activists and civil rights icons.

In 2022, Erin and the Freedom Writers Foundation released their latest book, *Dear Freedom Writer*. This critically acclaimed book combines heartfelt letters written by the next generation of student authors with deeply personal responses from the original Freedom Writers.

Be it in the classroom, or otherwise, Erin's powerful message of hope and possibility is sure to resonate with any audience, whom she encourages "to stand up, speak up and speak out."

Select Keynotes

- **Becoming a Catalyst for Change**

Erin Gruwell helped 150 of her students - many of whom were written off by the education system - to use the power of education to write a book, graduate from high school and attend college. In her inspiring presentation, Gruwell tells the story of this extraordinary journey - from poverty and despair to hope and promise - with stops at Anne Frank's House and Auschwitz and then on to Capitol Hill and Congress. Erin challenged her students to overcome the seemingly insurmountable problems of poverty, racism, violence. How can we all become role models for tolerance, respect, and cooperation? Erin Gruwell teaches us all how we can become "Catalysts for Change."

- **Teaching Tolerance**

In a scene from the hit movie *Freedom Writers*, a film based on Erin Gruwell's experiences as an English teacher to inner-city Los Angeles youth, a Latino student is drawing a derogatory picture of a fellow black student. Intercepting the racial correspondence, Gruwell is reminded of a caricature she had seen from the Museum of Tolerance - Holocaust propaganda of a Jew made to look like a rat. Drawing parallels between her students' ignorance and the prejudice of the Nazis, Gruwell captures the attention of her class by pointing out the seriousness of their actions and the implications that can follow. In a through-provoking presentation, Gruwell explores the very situations that have led us towards conflict



in the past and how tolerance and understanding could have prevented such negative outcomes. A true proponent that one person can make an extraordinary difference, Gruwell inspires us all to embrace the concept of changing lives by teaching tolerance.

Select Book Titles

- **2022:** Dear Freedom Writer
- **2009:** Teaching Hope
- **2007:** Teach With Your Heart
- **1999:** The Freedom Writers Diary
- **1999:** The Freedom Writers Diary: Teacher's Guide

Select Client Feedback

Erin touched the heart of our audience with her presentation. She is so authentic and charismatic. I had so many of our principals tell me how much they loved her. She is exactly what we needed. Thank you Erin!

– **Arlene Salyards** *Colorado Association of School Executives*