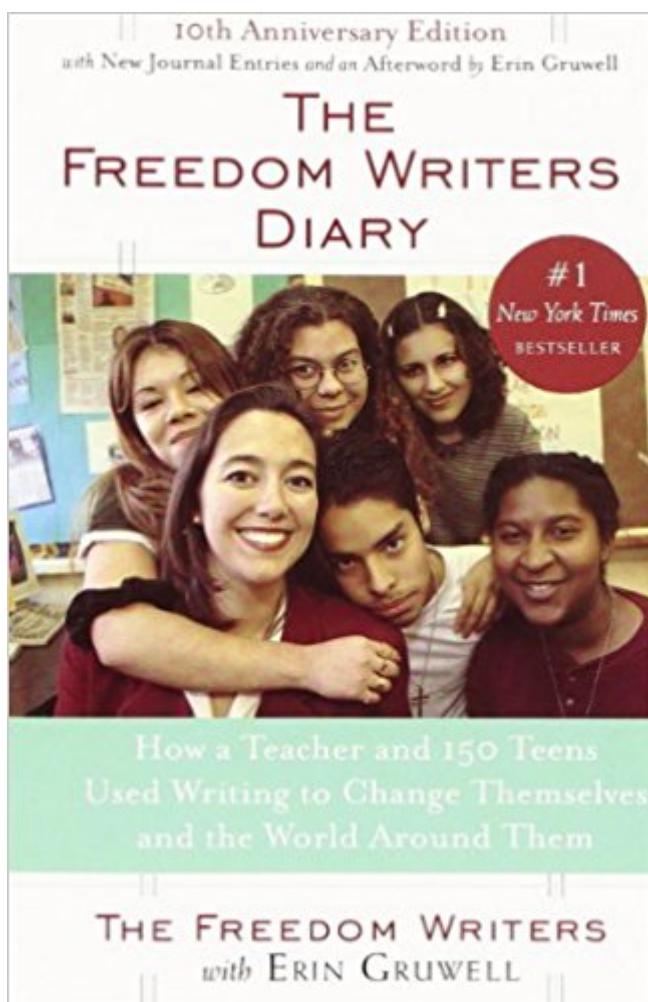


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# The Freedom Writers Diary: How A Teacher And 150 Teens Used Writing To Change Themselves And The World Around Them



## Synopsis

Straight from the front line of urban America, the inspiring story of one fiercely determined teacher and her remarkable students. As an idealistic twenty-three-year-old English teacher at Wilson High School in Long Beach, California, Erin Gruwell confronted a room of *unteachable, at-risk* students. One day she intercepted a note with an ugly racial caricature, and angrily declared that this was precisely the sort of thing that led to the Holocaust *only to be met by uncomprehending looks*. So she and her students, using the treasured books Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl and Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life in Sarajevo as their guides, undertook a life-changing, eye-opening, spirit-raising odyssey against intolerance and misunderstanding. They learned to see the parallels in these books to their own lives, recording their thoughts and feelings in diaries and dubbing themselves the *Freedom Writers* *in homage to the civil rights activists* *The Freedom Riders*. With funds raised by a *Read-a-thon for Tolerance*, they arranged for Miep Gies, the courageous Dutch woman who sheltered the Frank family, to visit them in California, where she declared that Erin Gruwell's students were *the real heroes*. Their efforts have paid off spectacularly, both in terms of recognition *appearances on Prime Time Live* and *All Things Considered*, *coverage in People magazine*, a meeting with U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley *and educationally*. All 150 Freedom Writers have graduated from high school and are now attending college. With powerful entries from the students' own diaries and a narrative text by Erin Gruwell, *The Freedom Writers Diary* is an uplifting, unforgettable example of how hard work, courage, and the spirit of determination changed the lives of a teacher and her students. Erin Gruwell is now a visiting professor at California State University, Long Beach, where some of her students are Freedom Writers. The authors' proceeds from this book will be donated to The Tolerance Education Foundation, an organization set up to pay for the Freedom Writers' college tuition.

## Book Information

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## **Customer Reviews**

When Gruwell was a first-year high school teacher in Long Beach, CA, teaching the "unteachables" (kids that no other teacher wanted to deal with), she discovered that most of her students had not heard of the Holocaust. Shocked, she introduced them to books about toleranceAfirst-person accounts by the likes of Anne Frank and Zlata Filopovic, who chronicled her life in war-torn Sarajevo. The students were inspired to start keeping diaries of their lives that showed the violence, homelessness, racism, illness, and abuse that surrounded them. These student diaries form the basis of this book, which is cut from the same mold as Dangerous Minds: the outsider teacher, who isn't supposed to last a month, comes in and rebuilds a class with tough love and hard work. Most readers will be proud to see how these students have succeeded; at the end of their four-year experience, the Freedom WritersAas they called themselves, in honor of the Freedom Riders of the 1960sAhad all graduated; Grunwell now works at the college level, instructing teachers on how to provide more interactive classes for their students. Recommended for youth, education, and urban studies collections. ADanna C. Bell-Russel, Lib. of Congress, Washington, DC Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

ERIN GRUWELL, the Freedom Writers,Â and her nonprofit organization have received many awards,Â including the prestigious Spirit of Anne Frank Award, andÂ have appeared onÂ The Oprah Winfrey Show, Prime Time Live, Good Morning America,Â andÂ The View, to name a few.Â AllÂ 150 Freedom Writers went on to graduate from Wilson High.Â She lives in Long Beach, California.

I purchased this book solely because the last 5 minutes of the movie cut out. I cried my way through the kids entries and my conservative heart was opened up to the "victims" of undocumented aliens, USA war zones, and children's lives in disarray but now with hope. Many of the books mentioned

are now on my reading list as is a visit to the tolerance museum, that I didn't know existed. Thank you. Each of you for educating me.

Freedom Writers Diary is a book composed by Ms. Erin Gruwell and the many students who became part of her extended family during her first four years teaching at Woodrow Wilson High School in Long Beach, California. The high school students' lives were forever changed by the teaching practices of this young, unorthodox teacher and this book offers a glimpse inside some of the many interesting and surprising entries written by the students themselves in their daily journals. This book is a collection of 142 diary entries taken from the students and the candidness of these young people will shock some readers. Students share their most private thoughts, and they include daily encounters with physical violence; frequent engagements with guns and gunfire; everyday encounters with dysfunctional family members; and constant reminders of their own problems and those of the world immediately around them. Some of the entries sound like they were taken straight from the dialogue of a violent movie. Others sound like they came from the transcript of a busy social worker. The students generally write with a certain feeling of dread and despair. They cannot believe that anything positive will ever come from their lives and they don't believe that anything will ever get them away from their neighborhoods and away from the suffocating lifestyle that they have known since birth. But as you read the diary entries, you will slowly notice a change in attitude. It starts out slowly and starts to grow. The pessimistic thoughts and general feelings of gloom and doom are slowly replaced by a positive outlook on life. The entries in this book are in chronological order so that the reader can clearly witness the changes as they take place. There are no names (except for a few exceptions), but in some instances you can tell by the stories which entries were written by the same people based on their content. The transformation of the students is encouraging, and they have Erin Gruwell to thank for the change in attitude that convinces these once hopeless underachievers to realize that they really are capable of great things. One surprising quality of the entries in this book is the writing itself. It isn't perfect, but it is far better than many readers will imagine. I noticed this right away and I wondered how the students were able to learn to write so effectively in so little time. Then, I discovered why: Erin Gruwell wasn't content to let her students write sloppy, grammatically incorrect diary entries. She insisted that they take time to edit what they wrote each day. Only after close scrutiny with an editor's pen did their ordinary prose become good enough for inclusion in this book. This was a smart- not to mention educational- move by Ms. Gruwell. Not only did it make the entries more readable for publication in a book, it also taught the students how to proofread and make corrections.

so that their written material would be more presentable. Overall, The Freedom Writers Diary is a very interesting, very realistic book written by a determined teacher and the 150 students whose lives she helped change for the better. The brutal honesty will shock, enrage, and sadden many readers. But the personal growth of these youngsters as they move from grade to grade and slowly mature into happier, more confident youth is both uplifting and inspiring. It shows the power that one person can have on the lives of others and it's a book worth reading for both educators and others who like books with fresh ideas and positive messages.

This is the book that the movie is based on. There are students' writing as well as the teacher's. Combined they give an accurate and moving picture of what life was like for these kids. I think all English teachers should read this, especially when they are struggling in their job. It's a good reminder of why you wanted to be a teacher.

I couldn't put this down! I cried and was horrified at some of the stories, but was mostly inspired by the caring teacher and the open-minded students who wanted to improve their stories. You can really only read a few diary entries at a time because it's so heart-wrenching, but it's totally worth it.

What amazing autobiographies -very inspiring. Thank heaven Erin Gruwell didn't stick to the mainstream (failing) teaching methods. It would be great to know how the founding members are today. Thank you for the great read.

Book arrived in a timely manner and as promised. Satisfied with transaction. I had watched the 'movie' and the book was a great follow-up.

Such a grand story. I had to buy the book so I could learn more about this wonderful teacher and her incredible students.. such an inspiring story. I would wish that all our children have teachers to meet their needs such as these children got. I have incredible great grandchildren who I live with. I can only hope I can guide and inspire them as these wonderful kids continue to do. I will definitely save this story to share with others.

very inspirational book about children who learn to overcome racism and low standards set for them by society. this book focuses on diversity and challenges of minorities and can help you become more open minded.

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