

Erin Gruwell

Educator and Founder of the Freedom Writers Foundation

Erin Gruwell has earned awards 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 Erin. The film is based on *The Freedom Writers Diary*, the New York Times bestseller that chronicles Erin's extraordinary journey with 150 high school students who had been written off by the education system.

By fostering an education philosophy that valued and promoted diversity, Erin transformed her students' lives. She encouraged them to re-think rigid beliefs about themselves and others, to reconsider daily decisions, and ultimately to re-chart their futures. With Erin'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.

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

While Erin 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 in Long Beach, CA. She decided to channel her classroom experiences toward a broader cause, and today her impact as a teacher extends well beyond Room 203. Erin founded the Freedom Writers Foundation where she currently trains teachers around the country in how to implement her innovative lesson plans into their own classrooms. Recently, Erin's teaching methods from her time in Room 203 have been published in *The Freedom Writers' Diary Teacher's Guide*.

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

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

Erin Gruwell was a Girl Scout growing up and the tradition of Girl Scouting and continues in her life today. Her sister is currently troop leader for Erin's niece, Emma.