



Former inner-city high school English teacher **Erin Gruwell** changed the lives of her students and became a change agent for the future of education with her philosophy of tolerance, respect, and the power of writing one's own story. Charged with turning around a class of low performing, underserved kids who lived in a community plagued by gang violence and racial hostility, Gruwell compared the family feud in *Romeo and Juliet* to a gang war and used the stories of Anne Frank and Zlata Filipović—students who wrote about their lives during wartime—to help students recognize the transformative power of writing their own stories in a world that felt chaotic and out of control.

Promoting tolerance and acceptance, Gruwell inspired her students to re-chart their futures. Sharing their journal entries with each other anonymously, teens who once refused to speak to kids of other races embraced each other as family. Dubbing themselves the “Freedom Writers”—in homage to civil rights activists known as the Freedom Riders—Gruwell and students captured their journey in the *New York Times* #1 bestseller, *The Freedom Writers Diary*, which has been called an “eye-opening, spirit-raising odyssey against intolerance and misunderstanding.” The book sold over one million copies and inspired the major motion picture *Freedom Writers*, starring Oscar winner Hilary Swank as Erin. All 150 of Gruwell’s students graduated from high school, became published writers and catalysts for change, and over half graduated from college. Many remain active with the foundation Gruwell formed to teach the Freedom Writers philosophy and methods to schools around the country. Erin is also the author of *Teach with Your Heart: Lessons I...*

## Testimonials

□ *On a scale of 1 (not valuable) to 4 (extremely valuable), her keynote earned a 3.99. WHO GETS A 3.99?! Unreal. We loved her stories, her integrity, her perseverance, and her unparalleled capacity to care about children who would otherwise have been written off as “bad kids.” Because of Erin, they chose to forego lives filled with drugs, teenage pregnancy, and racial hatred in favor of becoming curious learners, published writers, and college students with limitless possibility. Again, thank you.* □

- Linkage.

□ *I cannot tell you how fantastic Erin Gruwell was! She will be remembered as one of our top speakers in the 12-year history of this series. She packed the lecture theater, connected with the audience so effectively and students stood up and talked about their struggles academically in trying to earn their degree. She was encouraging and inspiring. WE LOVED HER! Then, Erin sat and talked to student after student for an additional nearly two hours, connecting with each one in a way that I know each individual will remember. She has amazing stamina, grace, and chutzpah. We need her voice in education. Thank you for sending Erin our way!* □

- Delta College.

**Erin Gruwell**

### Speech Topics

- Motivation
- Inspiration
- Education
- Change



