



Academy Award® Winner

HILARY SWANK



FREEDOM WRITERS

our story our words

PARAMOUNT PICTURES PRESENTS IN ASSOCIATION WITH MTV FILMS & JERSEY FILMS / DOUBLE FEATURE FILMS PRODUCTION HILARY SWANK
"FREEDOM WRITERS" SCOTT GLENN IMELDA STAUNTON PATRICK DEMPSEY MARIO LAMARCA MARK ISHAM AND WILL E. SHUT SUPERVISOR MARY RAMOS COSTUME DESIGNER CINDY EVANS EDITOR DAVID MORITZ PRODUCTION DESIGNER LAURENCE BENNETT DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY JIM DENHAULT
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS HILARY SWANK TRACEY DUBNING MAN MORALES DAN LEVINE PRODUCED BY DANNY DI VITO MICHAEL SHAMBERG STACEY SHEER BASED UPON THE BOOK "THE FREEDOM WRITERS DIARY" BY THE FREEDOM WRITERS WITH ERIN GROUWELL
SCREENPLAY BY RICHARD LAGRAVENESE DIRECTED BY RICHARD LAGRAVENESE
COMING SOON
FreedomWriters.com
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SOUNDTRACK AVAILABLE ON HILARY SWANK RECORDS
HEAD THE PAPERBACK FROM BROADWAY BOOKS

FREEDOM WRITERS –SUMMARY

Rated (M) for Moderate Themes and Violence and Infrequent Moderate Course Language

Fresh-faced, idealistic twenty-three-year-old Erin Gruwell (Hilary Swank) is ready to take on the world as she steps inside Wilson High School for her first day of teaching. Her class, a diverse group of racially charged teenagers from different walks of life – African Americans, Latinos, Asians, juvenile delinquents, gang members, and underprivileged students from poor neighbourhoods – hope for nothing more than to make it through the day.



On the surface, the only thing they share is their hatred for each other and the understanding that they are simply being warehoused in the educational system until they are old enough to disappear. Despite her students' obstinate refusal to participate during class, Erin tries various means to engage them on a daily basis. But then ghetto reality steps in to focus the picture.

A racially motivated gang shooting witnessed by a Latina gang member in Erin's class, and an ugly racial cartoon that Erin intercepts during class, become the most unwittingly dynamic teaching aids. They spark a transformation in the classroom, compel them to listen and force her to take off her idealistic blinders and take in the kids' survival stories of their undeclared war on the streets. Erin begins to connect with them. She brings in music from the 'Hood, and literature from another kind of ghetto, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, and with these simple tools she opens her students' eyes to the experiences of those suffering intolerance throughout the world and the struggles of those outside their own communities.

Knowing that every one of her students has a story to tell, Erin encourages them to keep a daily journal of their thoughts and experiences. After sharing their stories with one another, the students see their shared experience for the first time and open up to the idea that there are possibilities in life outside of making it to the age of eighteen. Based on a true story, "Freedom Writers" is an inspirational tale and testimony to courage, hope and the human spirit's triumph over intolerance. As the students' diaries transform from schoolwork into life preservers, Gruwell's commitment to them grows and affects her in ways she did not imagine.



BACKGROUND

Two-time Academy Award® winner Hilary Swank takes on the role of Erin Gruwell. "True stories resonate with me," says Swank. "I was inspired by the screenplay and moved by its humanity. I felt in my heart and soul that I needed to be a part of telling this story. When I found out that I was Erin's first choice to bring her story to the screen, I thought it would be an honor to do so."

"I poured out my heart in an e-mail to Erin," Swank continues. "After I read the script, I wanted to meet her, talk to her, and tell her how important I thought her story was."

"I felt that in some way teaching was the most noble thing that I could do in our own country, working with kids who oftentimes don't have the best teachers, supplies or the best schools," says Gruwell. "I really wanted a school that had diversity, that had been affected by the riots and could be this wonderful eclectic mix of races and economics and cultures. On paper, Wilson seemed to be perfect because it was this fusion of affluent kids and abject poverty, and included every ethnicity under the sun with kids who could be headed off to Harvard or off to jail."



After a tragedy shook the student body, Gruwell searched for a way to address the issues in her students' lives. Assigning them *The Diary of Anne Frank*, she found that many students were able to identify with Anne's challenges growing up in a warzone.



It was Gruwell's next assignment that would profoundly change her students' lives: she asked them to keep a journal, recording their experiences, their emotions, their challenges, and their triumphs. "The kids learned to pick up a pen instead of a gun, and the act of writing saved them," explains director Richard LaGravenese. "Erin asked them to write about their wars and battles and it opened the gates for them to share their lives, which no one had ever asked them to do before. Through Anne Frank, she opened their eyes to a thirteen-year-old girl going through a war of her own and how writing helped her cope with her situation – and then, Erin showed them how to apply that to their own lives."

"One of the things that drew us to making this film was the notion that one person really can make a difference," explains producer Stacey Sher. "Erin Gruwell is a hero like anybody else can be a hero. She was frightened but saw that something had to be done and couldn't turn her back on these kids. She empowered them with the tools to essentially help themselves."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Galations 5:22

But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard--things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people.

The Message

Erin Gruwell had a unique gift to teach the youth in the film, she also had a great deal of compassion for the lost and marginalized, read Galatians 5: 22 how did Erin's gift enable her to "stick with things"

Marcus tells Erin that gang members get to die with "respect." Why is "respect" so important? Does it have to be given before it is earned? Who should start giving? How is respect given and earned over the course of this film?

Are Erin's students being "rewarded" for their bad behavior, as some of her fellow teachers insist? How would you balance "the law" and "grace" here?

Do you think it is worthwhile or empowering to write about bad experiences, even if the experiences do not change or improve? Why or why not? Is it worthwhile or empowering to *read* about someone else's bad experiences? Why or why not?

Do you think it was fair of Erin's husband to ask who she would choose, him or her students? Why or why not? How do you think you would have handled things differently, if you were Erin, or if you were her husband? Was divorce inevitable?

How did the students experiences in the Jewish museum alter their perspectives on their current plight?