

Freedom Writers

It's the dumb class cuz. It means you too dumb.

The Freedom Writers Diary is the amazing true story of strength, courage, and achievement in the face of adversity. In the fall of 1994, in Room 203 at Woodrow Wilson High School in Long Beach, California, an idealistic teacher named Erin Gruwell faced her first group of students, dubbed by the administration as "unteachable, at-risk" teenagers. The class was a diverse mix of African-American, Latino, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Caucasian students, many of whom had grown up in rough neighborhoods in Long Beach. In the first few weeks of class, the students made it clear that they were not interested in what their teacher had to say, and made bets about how long she would last in their classroom.

Cast and Characters:

Hilary Swank – Erin Gruwell	Patrick Dempsey – Scott Casey	Scott Glenn – Steve Gruwell
Imelda Staunton - Margaret Campbell	April L. Hernandez - Eva	Mario – Andre
Kristin Herrera – Gloria	Jaclyn Ngan - Sindy	Sergio Montalvo – Alejandro
Jason Finn – Marcus	Deance Wyatt – Jamal	Vanetta Smith – Brandy
Gabriel Chavarria – Tito	Hunter Parish – Ben	Antonio Garcia – Miguel
Giovonnie Samuels – Victoris	Pat Carroll – Miep Gies	Will Morales –Paco

1. Early in the movie, you were given a ‘sneak peak’ of the Distinguished Honors classroom and then a longer look at Erin Gruwell’s classroom. What impact does the ‘environment’ have on the learning process? On the ‘survival process’ these students employed outside of the classroom?
2. “A school is like a city and a city is like a prison!” {Eva} Through her eyes, what was it like to be an adolescent at this time and in this place?
3. What role does an ‘emotional connection’ play in the establishment of a meaningful relationship?
4. What caused Eva to not protect her ‘own kind’ at the trial?
5. How does Mrs. Gruwell’s personal purchase of the books tie into her respect for her students and her belief in them?
6. “I can’t promise them anything I can’t deliver!” {Erin Gruwell} What can you imply about the integrity of this teacher from this comment?
7. Each of us is surrounded by influence. How does the following statement reflect the influence Eva grew up under? “Nobody’s innocent and if you take enough of the victories, you will win!” {Eva’s Father}

8. Classroom dynamics are ever present! Mrs. Gruwell changed the ‘seating plan’ in her classroom. What was the immediate and then long-term impact on the climate of the class?
9. In the “Line Game” what observations did you make about the players as the game progressed?
10. At what point in the movie did Mrs. Gruwell make the connection in understanding the plight of her students? How did this impact her performance as a teacher and the atmosphere created in her classroom?
11. At the concert, Ben and Marcus approached each other and began to have a conversation. What was the reaction of their respective friends? Why?
12. “No, that don’t fly Ma!” {Marcus} What is the underlying context of this statement? How did Mrs. Gruwell interpret it and what do you think spawned her reaction?
13. Prior to handing out the journals, Mrs. Gruwell laid out a very specific set of guidelines regarding how the journals would be graded and accepted. How important is it to have a clear set of expectations and guidelines when bringing a ‘new concept’ online? What does doing so establish?
14. Did you anticipate the response that Mrs. Gruwell received on the invitation to hand in the journals for her reading? Do you think Mrs. Gruwell was surprised? What can you imply about the students response to this invitation?
15. Why does Gloria decide to switch into Mrs. Gruwell’s English classroom from the Distinguished Honors classroom?
16. When you look at the characters portrayed in the movie, you will have noticed a true change in their beings. What do you identify as the three major changes and why do you believe the students underwent this transformation?
17. In your opinion, why do you think Mrs. Gruwell persevered with her students and travelled this journey with them?
18. At this stage in your life, who has been your “Mrs. Gruwell”? It might be a teacher, a parent, a neighbor, a boss! How have they influenced you and what has been the result of their presence in your life?