

Edma Olivo
Mr. Moes
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“Freedom Writers” Film Review

“Freedom Writers”, which was originally a teacher’s diary written by Erin Gruwell, was made up of troubles her students attending Wilson High school had, particularly in their past, present, and future. The book/diary was eventually made into a film, directed by Richard La Gravenese, and starring Hilary Swank as Mrs. Gruwell, and it won a humanitas prize for feature film category as well as being nominated for an image award in 2008. Erin Gruwell is a teacher who defeats all odds and teaches her at risk students that there is more to life than gangs and violence. The film is a must see because it teaches her students and audience alike to learn tolerance, to live amongst each other in peace, and how important perusing an education is.

Erin Gruwell is just starting her first teaching job as a freshman and sophomore English teacher at Wilson high school. Administration assigns her to a class of “unteachable” students of Latino, black, and a few other ethnicities. The group of juveniles experience much hardship in their day to day lives. At first sight the kids want to learn nothing from a “privileged white” woman who has never experienced violence and discrimination first hand. Andre, one of her students, states, “Why should I give my respect to you? Because you’re a teacher? I don’t know you. How do I know you’re not a liar standing up there? How do I know you’re not a bad person standing up there? I’m not just going to give you my respect because you’re called a teacher.” She quickly learns that her students have much more to worry about than homework. After a piece of paper holding a racist and hateful message is passed around the class, she explains to her class how actions like that were the result of all the hate and misunderstanding that led to the holocaust. This is the start of the kids understanding how their actions can affect others, and from there begins their transformation.

The story is successful because it signifies the importance of ideas and social justice. Eva, a stubborn soul, says “In America, a girl can be crowned a princess for her beauty, and her grace. But an Aztec princess is chosen for her blood. To fight for her people as Papi and his father fought, against those who say we are less than they are, against those who say that we are not equal in beauty or blessings.” This moment and others highlight the social and cultural oppression confronting her students, but through her perseverance, compassion, and dedication, Erin inspires her students that there is more to life outside of gang violence and death. Though gaining their trust is a mission for her, she manages to grab their attention by making them see how segregation and racism led to the Second World War. The film represents teens, different ethnic groups, corrupted minds and gang violence. Experience has taught many of the students to distrust white people, which includes Mrs. Gruwell, but as she soon teaches them, stereotypes are harmful for everyone and one’s ethnicity should not negatively define his or her character; before judging someone, we must get to know them. The film as well as the book also teach a lot about writing and how it’s a great form to express oneself and write about how one is and how an individual feels.

“Freedom Writers” is a meaningful film that can inspire juveniles and help them develop strategies that life has so much to offer. It contains knowledge about history as well as life

lessons. It's a good example of what having someone to support you can do for an individual. Ultimately, it shows the powerful influence a teacher can have on the lives of his or her students.