

# ***Life Lessons***

## ***A Q&A from Erin Gruwell, the Freedom Writers Courageous Teacher***

**What have your experiences teaching, lecturing, and working with young people taught you?**

I have learned that, although I am a good teacher, I am a much better student, and I was blessed to learn valuable lessons from my students on a daily basis. They taught me the importance of teaching to a student—and not to a test.

**Writing played a central role in your work with students. What struck you the most while reading their words?**

I was humbled by their honesty, their courage, and their ability to allow a piece of paper to bear witness to their lives.

**How important do you think expression is for young citizens?**

I believe that everyone has a story, and it is important that we encourage all students to tell theirs.

**Your work with students also involved role-playing games and other exercises. What was the goal of these activities?**

Since kids learn in a myriad of ways and have different learning modalities, my lesson plans had to be creative to reflect that diversity. Whether my students were auditory, visual, or kinesthetic learners, I tried to engage them at their level.

**Why do you think these activities should be encouraged and implemented in the classroom?**

Since there is no one-size-fits-all strategy that will engage all students, I found it important to diversify all of my lessons.

**How do these activities help to prepare students for interactions in their communities outside the classroom, if at all?**

I taught my students how to be critical thinkers and problem solvers—intellectual traits they will use to attain success for the rest of their lives.

**In general, how do you feel young people handle or will handle the responsibilities of becoming better citizens?**

I empowered my students to become socially conscious of the world around them; thus they continually fight for equality for all the world's citizens.

**Do you think they're up to it?**

I believe that all students, when asked to be accountable for their actions and to be socially aware citizens, will become agents for change!

**What advice would you give to new teachers?**

Since I believe teaching is one of the noblest professions, I would encourage young teachers to follow their calling and bring their passion with them into the classroom!

**Now that you have also worked outside of the classroom with young people, what advice do you think this perspective could offer the more experienced and still-teaching educator?**

Believe in each and every one of your students and never give up on them!

**Where do you see your work taking you in the future?**

I believe that education is the greatest equalizer; thus I will continue to fight to equalize the playing field in an educational atmosphere that is not always level!

**About the Writer**

*Erin Gruwell, the Freedom Writers, and her nonprofit organization, The Freedom Writers Foundation, have received many awards, including the prestigious Spirit of Anne Frank Award, and have appeared on The Oprah Winfrey Show, Primetime, Good Morning America, and The View, to name a few. Gruwell is also a charismatic motivational speaker who spreads her dynamic message to students, teachers, and business people around the world. She lives in southern California.*