
Title	Thank you, Ms Gruwell
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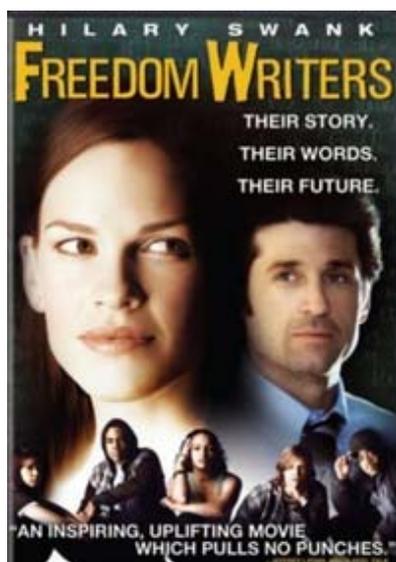
Thank You, Ms Gruwell

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In our last issue, Professor Julianne Moss recommended the movie *Freedom Writers* as a way to reflect on one's practice. Our *SingTeach* reviewer gives a personal take on this movie.

Dear Ms G,

I hope you don't mind me calling you that. I rather like this term of affection your students at Woodrow Wilson High coined for you. I recently caught *Freedom Writers* and the story of Room 203 blew my mind.



I don't think anyone can remain unmoved by this movie. It was difficult to watch the daily struggles of your students. The kind of environment these teenagers lived in, where even the taken-for-granted act of turning up for classes became a matter of life and death, was just unimaginable.

But even that wasn't as alarming as knowing that some of your students carried guns to school for protection. It was as if there was nowhere safe for these teenagers because even the school, as if mirroring the city's troubles, was divided along racial lines and throbbled with racial tension.

As I watched the events unfold on screen, my hands kept reaching for the synopsis sheet, to confirm again and again that this movie was based on real-life events. It was as if these teenagers were "in a war".

I think you're very brave to have constantly tried to reach out to them, even after they declared that they hated you because you were white. You tried to reach out to them in their language—playing hip-hop music to discuss poetry, joking with them about Homer/Holmer—and yet they remained indifferent.

I was impressed by how you managed to turn your students' misdeeds into teaching opportunities. When the racist caricature was passed around your class, you could have dismissed it as a childish prank but you met them face on and jolted them back to reality by telling them about the Holocaust.

I was rooting for you! But I caught myself wondering if your department head was right when she said, "You can't make someone want an education." As I watched them snub your efforts time and again, because they could not foresee a better future than the lives they were leading, because they did not understand the importance of learning, I couldn't help but wonder if it was worth the effort.

I don't think I could ever be as courageous or persistent as you. It was hard but you never gave up, and I was really glad when you proved me—and your department head—wrong.

You gave them a voice by creating for them a safe space to tell their stories. You restored their self-esteem when you gave them new books, even when they were

deemed "unteachable" by the school administration.

These were simple acts, but they made these teenagers feel that each of them mattered. Your belief and faith gave them hope that the possibilities for their futures could be limitless.

So thank you, Ms G. Thank you for showing me that with passion, creativity and kindness, it is possible to make a difference in this world.

About the reviewer

May Ng is a Research Assistant who was initially reluctant to watch and review Freedom Writers, but after 123mins, she was glad she gave the movie a chance.

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