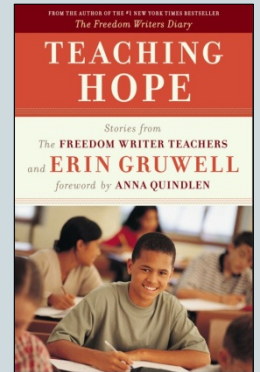
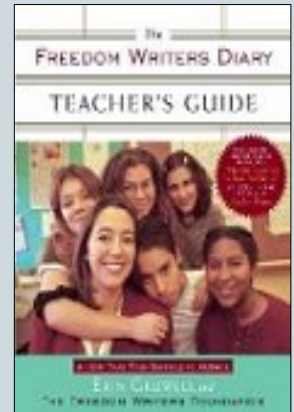
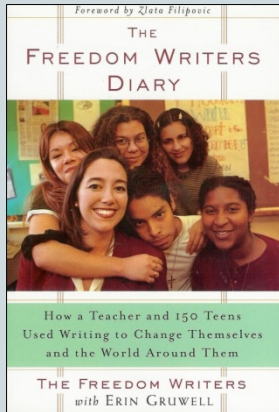


ENGAGE, ENLIGHTEN, EMPOWER YOUR STUDENTS USING THE FREEDOM WRITERS METHOD



MARCUS L. STROTHER



Activities

- ❖ Introductions
- ❖ Why this Work?
- ❖ The Seed
- ❖ Suitcase Activity
- ❖ Line Game
- ❖ Forgiveness Journals
- ❖ A Toast for Change



FREEDOM WRITERS



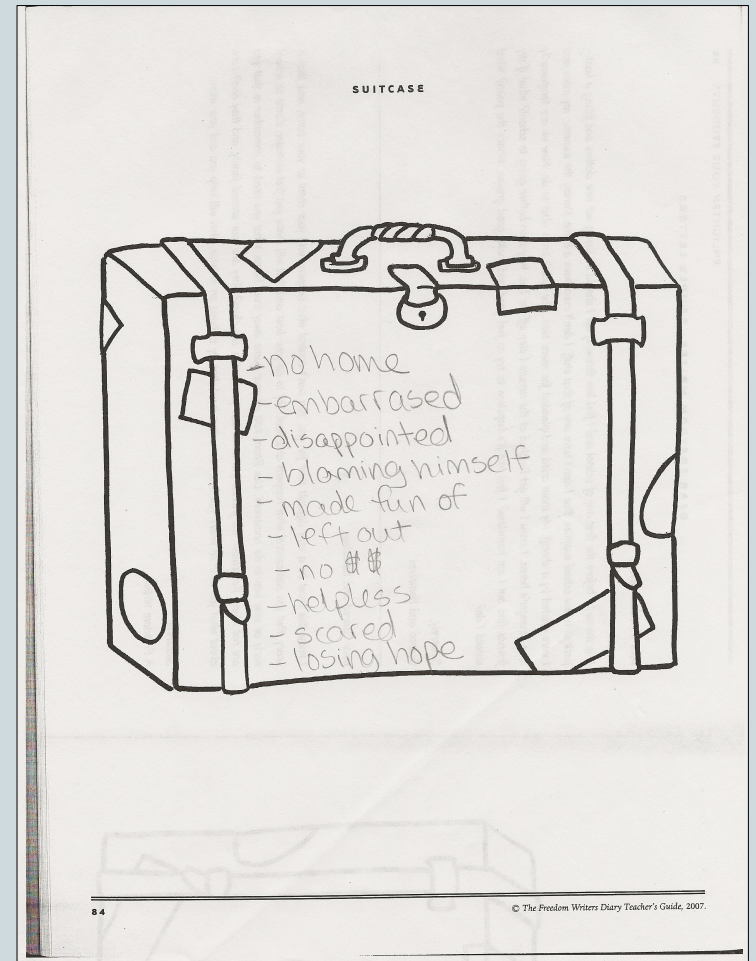
- 150 students from Long Beach, California
 - Lowest students academically
 - Students were expected to be dead or in jail before age 18
 - Only had three things in common: hated school, hated each other, hated their teacher
- Erin Gruwell
 - First-year teacher
 - Created a curriculum based on tolerance
- All 150 students overcame the labels placed on them, graduated, and became “citizens for change”

FREEDOM WRITERS



Suitcase Activity

- 2-3 Post It Notes
- “Pack” the suitcase by identifying what you brought with you today



RATIONALE OF METHODOLOGY



- Activates prior knowledge and increases comprehension
- Engages theories of intelligence
- Supports character education
- Endorses civics, community-building, and tolerance & diversity education
- Strengthens persuasive writing, thinking, and speaking
- Advances critical thinking skills
- Promotes differentiated instruction
- Encourages project-based learning
- Aligns with nationally-approved CC standards

THE FREEDOM WRITERS PHILOSOPHY



- **ENGAGE:** draw students into the learning process, help them make connections between who they are as individuals and who they are as students, and encourage them to discover commonalities with their classmates



THE FREEDOM WRITERS PHILOSOPHY



- **ENLIGHTEN:** help students become critical thinkers as they practice different kinds of writing and public speaking as well as explore their own opinions, reasoning, and reactions within a “real world” context



THE FREEDOM WRITERS PHILOSOPHY



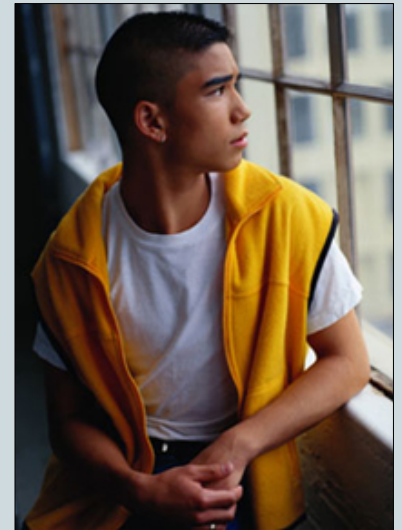
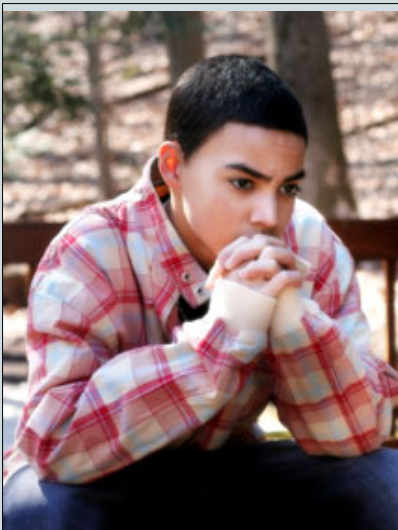
- **EMPOWER:** encourage students to achieve positive changes in themselves and in their communities by bringing the outside world into the classroom and taking the classroom into the world



THE FREEDOM WRITERS PHILOSOPHY



- Everyone has a voice that deserves to be heard
- Our students have a “Ph.D.” of the streets, and this needs to be leveraged to engage them in their learning process
- Everyone deserves a second chance, and education empowers our students toward becoming ‘Catalysts For Change’



THE FREEDOM WRITERS FOUNDATION



- Mission: to change the educational system one classroom at a time by providing educators with transformative tools to engage, enlighten, and empower at-risk students to reach their full potential
 - Equipping teachers with the tools they need to reach and empower their students
 - Increasing teacher retention and fulfillment
 - Lowering student dropout rates
 - Creating classrooms with an atmosphere of cultural inclusion and acceptance

Questions



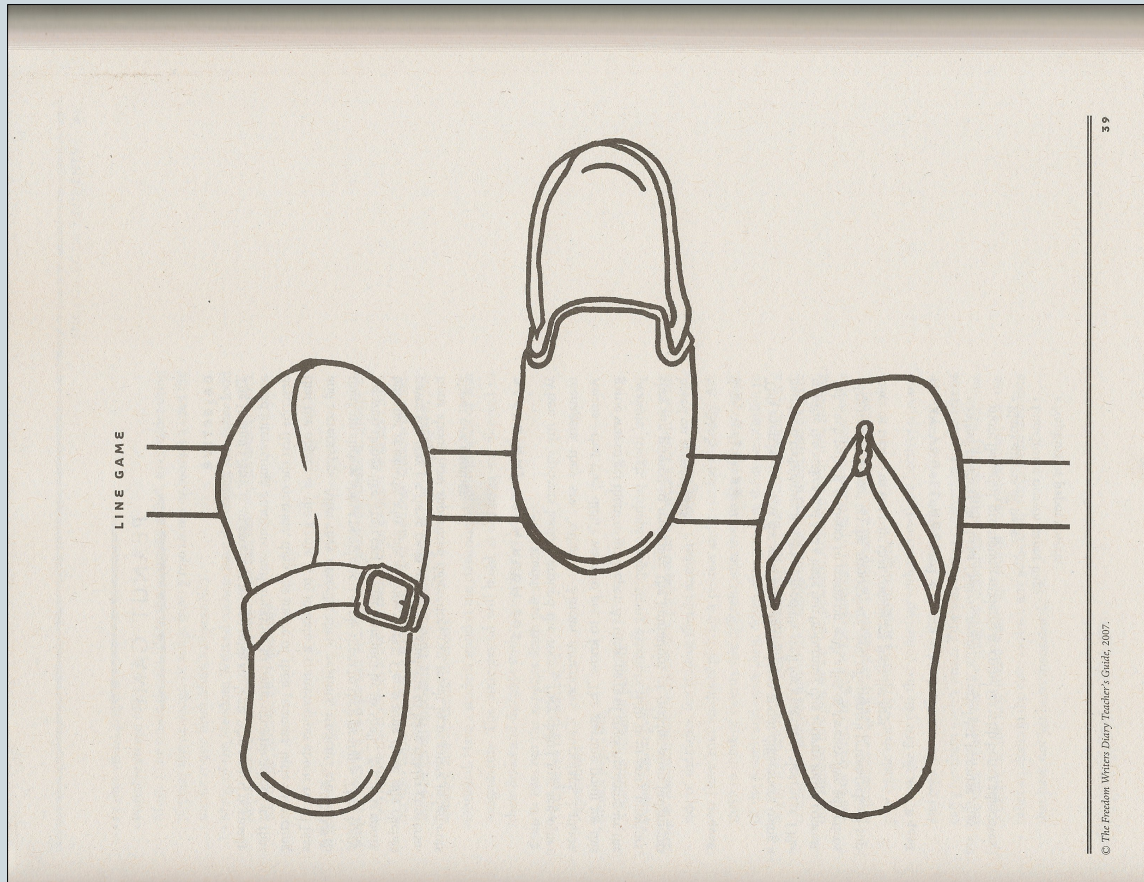
THE FREEDOM WRITERS INSTITUTE



- Designed to train and support educators of at-risk students, with the long-term strategy of retaining passionate and dedicated teachers who are committed to transforming their students' education and, ultimately, their quality of life
- Currently 400 trained teachers in North America



LINE GAME



ACCEPTANCE

BIAS

PREJUDICED

RELEVANCE

VALIDATE

LINE GAME WRITING PROMPTS



- How did you feel standing on the line?
- How did you feel when there were only a few people on the line?
- Were you ever the only person on/off the line? What did this feel like?
- What did you learn about yourself from participating in this activity?
- What did you learn about others in our group?
- Was there a statement that you wanted to ask but for whatever reason did not? Why?

Questions????



Forgiveness Journals





SYNONYMOUS



DIARY 17



Diary 17

Dear Diary,

In Ms. Gruwell's class today, we played the "Peanut Game." The rules of the game included one piece of paper and a description of a peanut inside and out. I wrote about the peanut and said it was small, round, and dirty. On the other side of the paper I stated that even though it looked terrible, it tasted fantastic! We categorized all of the peanuts by mentioning their different exteriors. I soon realized the "Peanut Game" was similar to the situation I had about my weight.

One day in junior high, I was getting off the school bus from a seat in the back. It is a seat where no one likes to sit and is always empty. I heard people shouting, "Hey, Fats!" "You big buffalo!" A group of obnoxious girls screamed such awful comments that I, an "obese" twelve-year-old girl, will sadly remember for the rest of my life.

"Oh no, not again! Please not again!" I thought to myself as I stood up to get off the bus. I had tried to ignore the girls' name-calling the entire ride home. Now that we were at my stop, I knew I had to face them before getting off. In order to leave the bus I had to walk through a long crowded aisle and face the obnoxious girls. As I stood up, the girls followed. They crowded together, and approached me as if they were ready to strike at me. Why did they want to take their anger out on me? What did I do to them? All of the sudden, the girls began to kick and sock me repeatedly. I could feel the pain all over my body but felt defenseless. I did not fight back.

They continued to hurt me as if there was nothing more important to them than to see me in pain. The last few kicks were the hardest; all I wanted to do was to get off the bus alive. My friends were staring at me, hoping that I would do something to make the girls stop. Why? Why didn't my friends help me? Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, I was able to release myself from their torture. I got off the bus alive. Imagining that the worst had already passed, I began to walk away from the bus and the girls stuck their heads out the window and spit on me. I could not believe it! They spit on my face!

The feeling of their spit striking me, running down my neck, and their germs accumulating on my face, felt disgusting. I heard paper crumbling in their hands, and then they threw it at me. I began to walk faster as the bus was on its way. While I was cleaning my face with a napkin, I could still hear the girls laughing. When they waved good-bye, my nightmare was over.

Today in Ms. Gruwell's classroom, I realized that a peanut is still a peanut even if the shell is different. Some taste better, others look fresher, but in the end they're all peanuts. Ms. G's analogy, "Don't judge a peanut by its shell, judge it by what's inside of it," made perfect sense to me. As long as I know that I am a human being, I don't need to worry about what other people say. In the end, we all are the same!

Diary 17: Coping with Weight

The writer of this entry describes being fiercely picked on due to her appearance: "I heard people shouting, 'Hey Fats!' 'You big buffalo!'" Think of a time when you or someone you know was the victim of a bully. How did you react?

DIARY #24



Diary 24

Dear Diary,

5:00 A.M.—The sound of my alarm clock woke me to a dark room this morning. The sun wasn't out yet, so I decided not to get up. My clock saw things differently and kept beeping.

So I thanked my clock by throwing it on the floor. The beeping stopped. As I looked over to see where the clock had landed, I realized I, too, was lying on the floor. Why? Because I don't have a bed. I turned on the lights so I could get started on my day. I walked past the closet mirror in the room to get my clothes. The mirror showed my sleeping space—a thick blanket and a pillow.

The mirror's reflection also revealed that the room does not belong to me. It made me feel sad. Almost at the point of crying. I grabbed my clothes from the closet and walked down the long hallway to the bathroom. During my shower, I cried. Tears mixed with the water streaming down my face. I welcomed the pain that came with the tears. It's the only way I can deal with my current situation. The room, hallway, and bathroom don't belong to me. This is not my home. My mom is down the hall sleeping in a room, but this is still not my home. I don't have a home anymore.

5:30 A.M.—I'm out of the bathroom, done with my shower, and ready to go. I have to remind myself that today is the first day of my tenth-grade year at Wilson High School. I should be happy that I get a chance to see my friends after not seeing them all

DIARY #24 CONTINUED



summer. But, I wonder if my friends' summer was as bad as mine. That summer was the worst in my short fourteen years of life. It all started with a phone call that I will never forget.

My mom was crying, begging, and pleading; asking for more time as if she were gasping for a last breath of air. Though I never paid attention to "adult matters," this time I was all ears. I never wanted to see my mom cry.

As she hung up the phone, she turned around to see me standing there confused and scared. I didn't know what was wrong. She quickly held me as tight as she could, hugged me, and said that she was sorry. She began to cry again, this time more so than when I walked in. Her tears hit my shirt like bullets. She told me that we were going to be evicted. She kept apologizing to me, saying she failed me as a mother and provider. She was a month behind on the rent. The landlord was already money hungry, so it made the situation worse. I was only fourteen and too young to get a job. The only job I could get in my neighborhood was selling drugs—so I decided to pass.

While kids were having fun enjoying the summer, I was packing my clothes and belongings into boxes and wondering where we were going to end up. My mom didn't know what to do or where to go. We had no family to lean on. No money was coming in. Without a job, my mom didn't have enough money to get another place. What to do? No father to help out, just a single mom and her son.

The night before the sheriff was supposed to pay us a unwelcome visit, I prayed to God for a way out of this madness. Sad and depressed, I attempted to get some sleep that night in the hope something would happen.

The morning of our eviction, a hard knock on the door woke me. The sheriff was here to do his job. We were moving all our stuff out as fast as we could. I started to look up to the sky, waiting

for something to happen. I looked at my mom to see if she was all right because she was silent moving the stuff out.

Our pastor had a friend who had a nice, big house where he lived by himself. The pastor's friend, who was informed of our situation, welcomed us with open arms. The arms of a stranger were a lot more comfortable than the arms of the sheriff.

6:00 A.M.—I'm waiting for the bus. Flashbacks of this summer pass through my mind like a song repeating itself over and over again. I try to tell myself it could have been worse. Nothing like this has ever happened to me. I started to think the situation was my fault because I always asked for the top video games every Christmas and birthday. I should have asked for something less expensive; something we could afford.

6:45 A.M.—I've ridden one bus to catch another bus that will now take me directly to school. School . . . why bother going to school? What's the use of going if I don't have a place to live? When friends ask how my summer was, what am I going to say? I was evicted from my apartment? I don't think so. I'm not going to tell a soul what happened. I knew everyone would be wearing new clothes, new shoes, and have new haircuts. Me? With outfits from last year, some old shoes, and no new haircut. I feel like it's hopeless to try to feel good and make good grades. There's no point to it.

7:10 A.M.—The bus stops in front of the school. My stomach feels like it's tightening into a tiny little ball. I feel like throwing up. I keep thinking that I'll get laughed at the minute I step off the bus. Instead, I'm greeted by a couple of my friends who were in my English class last year. At that point, it hits me. Ms. Gruwell, my crazy English teacher from last year, is really the only person that made me think of hope for my future. Talking with my friends about our English class and the adventures we had the year before, I began to feel better.

7:45 A.M.—I receive my class schedule and the first teacher on the list is Ms. Gruwell in Room 203. I walk in the room and I feel as though all the problems in my life are not important anymore. I am home.

EVALUATION



- Please complete the evaluation form and give to one of the presenters before you leave

Engage, Enlighten, Empower Your Students Using the Freedom Writers method November 19, 2011 NCTE Annual Convention (Chicago)	
1. Overall rating: () outstanding () excellent () good () fair () poor	
2. Section of today's presentation that you found most helpful:	
3. Topics that are still unclear:	
4. How will you use/share information when you return home?	
5. Questions and/or comments pertaining to the content of this training:	
Please include your email address if you would like a reply:	
Please return this completed evaluation in as you leave. Thank you for participating in our session today!	

THANK YOU



A young man walking down the beach observed an old man picking up starfish that had washed up on the shore. As he got closer, he saw the old man throwing them back into the ocean. He approached the old man and said, “What are you doing?” The old man replied, “If I don’t throw the starfish back in the water, they’re going to die.” “But there must be thousands of beaches and millions of starfish. You can’t save them all. Don’t you know you’ll never make a difference!” The old man reached down and picked up a starfish and simply replied, “I’ll make a difference to this one.”

