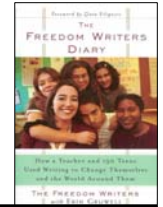


# The Freedom Writer Speakers Program



The Freedom Writers' is the amazing true story of strength, courage, and achievement in the face of adversity. In 1999 the Freedom Writers' journal entries would be compiled in a number one New York Times best-selling book, *The Freedom Writers Diary*. It would be followed by the film *Freedom Writers*, starring Hilary Swank in 2007. Most of the Freedom Writers never expected to graduate or even survive high school, and are now college graduates and successful professionals. They share their inspirational story with audiences across the country. Speaking to students in schools and juvenile halls, to educators, and at various conferences, they share their personal stories- relating the challenges they faced during high school, the positive transformation they made, and the keys to their success. The presentations are highly motivational, emotional, and show young people in particular that it's never too late to make positive change, no matter the challenges one faces. Below are some of our most popular speakers:

**Maria Reyes** was born in East Los Angeles and comes from a family with a strong gang heritage-both her father and grandfather were gang members. When she turned eleven, Maria was jumped into a gang. She was in and out of juvenile detention centers, and entered Teacher Erin Gruwell's class wearing an ankle monitor. Maria had very few positive role models around her and used violence to get what she wanted. She reluctantly began to read, and write in a journal at the prompting of Ms. Gruwell. She began to realize that she did want more for herself, and that positive change is possible at anytime. After her experience as a Freedom Writer, and finding herself in the pages of a book for the first time ever, Maria went on to earn her Bachelor's Degree from Cal State University Long Beach. Maria is portrayed in the film *Freedom Writers* as main character "Eva". Maria's speaking style is passionate and intense, addressing themes such as tolerance, self-worth, the power of reading, writing, and having your own voice.



**Sharaud Moore** says that he had all the right ingredients for failure as a young man. He was born to a 16 year old homeless single mother. At six, he was placed in a series of foster homes, and by 13 he had been to 14 different schools. Once living out of a car, he joined a gang, and was expelled from high school for carrying a pistol to class. Sharaud greatly disliked school and was a constant classroom disruption, until one day a malicious caricature was drawn of him, sparking the Freedom Writers movement and changing his views on education and the world around him. Sharaud is now a college graduate and Algebra teacher and coach at a high school he was once expelled from. Sharaud's speaking style is raw and engaging and he serves as a particularly excellent role model for young African American men. He discusses the challenges of living without positive male role models and being responsible for his siblings. Sharaud will have audiences laughing and crying, and serves as an excellent example of what is possible.



**Tony Becerra** grew up in an area replete with gang violence, where he was seriously injured after an assault, and lost several friends and family members. With an alcoholic father and mother busy working, he was often left to fend for himself. Tony began to learn English when he started school, and- often teased and beat up- he hated school and did poorly. During his experience as a Freedom Writer, Tony was encouraged to find a creative outlet and became involved in slam poetry. Since high school, Tony has worked as an Americorp volunteer in New York, and with the GEAR Up program in Southern California speaking to over 50,000 students and being awarded a Certificate of National Service. His speaking style is humorous, yet poignant and inspirational. He relays the experiences which led him to dislike school and become disengaged, and his transformation as a Freedom Writer finding his own voice to demand a better future for himself and set a positive example for young Latinos.



**Darrius Garrett** is portrayed in the film *Freedom Writers* as the student who is homeless and estranged from his mother. Darrius has had over 35 friends and family members die from drugs and gang violence. His own father died of AIDS. After being arrested for drug possession in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, Darrius was jailed. He was later released and enrolled in Ms. Gruwell's English class, a move that he believes changed his life. Darrius came to realize that he didn't want the street life anymore; he wanted to change- even if it meant his life. Darrius is now a published rapper, songwriter, author, poet, and aspiring actor. He serves as an Americorp volunteer, dedicated to increasing awareness about HIV/AIDS, especially among young people. As a Freedom Writer speaker, Darrius is particularly skilled at motivating young people to express their creativity, and to avoid negative influences in their lives.



To request the Freedom Writers as guest speakers, visit  
[www.freedomwritersfoundation.org/outreach](http://www.freedomwritersfoundation.org/outreach)



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