

## Discussion Questions for *Freedom Writers*

**Some of the major characters to watch for:** Erin Gruwell, Eva Benitez, Margaret Campbell, Steve Gruwell (Erin's father), Scott Casey (Erin's husband), Marcus, Jamal, Mario, Sindy, Gloria, Ben, Alejandro, Dr. Carl Cohn

1. In one of the classic scenes from the movie, Erin creates a line down the center of the classroom and tells her students to stand on the line if they've lost a friend to gang violence. Then more than one friend...then three...then four or more. Why is this "line game" so powerful and how does it begin to change the culture in her classroom?
2. Comment on Erin's approach to giving the students journals and having them write whatever they'd like and making it optional to turn them in for her to read. What do you make of the fact that so many were candid and submitted the journals to her? And how was this a turning point for both students and teacher?
3. Besides the journals and the "line game," Erin uses some other unorthodox approaches to reaching the students (taking them to a museum, taking them to a fancy dinner with Holocaust survivors, etc.). Why are these effective and what might they tell us about leadership and influence?
4. Contrast the disposition toward the students of Erin and her department chair, Margaret Campbell. How might Margaret have gotten to the point of being such an obstacle to progress?
5. Why do you think that leadership stories like these are the exception rather than the rule? What might you take away from this story to become a transforming influence to those around you?