

CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF ERIN GRUWELL FROM "FREEDOM WRITERS"

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed Erin Gruwell, a character from the movie "Freedom Writers". The goals of this study were to explore Erin Gruwell's personality, examine her salient traits, and learn interesting information about her. This study used a descriptive method and employed qualitative research. Data were examined by viewing the movie scenes and comprehending the movie script. The characters of Erin could be categorized into one of eight groups depending on their personalities and roles: protagonist, antagonist, underdog, sidekick, round, flat, static, and dynamic. In terms of roles and personalities, Erin Gruwell, the protagonist, had two different types of characters: protagonist and round. There were three distinct categories of characteristics: Psychotism, Extraversion, and Neuroticism. The findings revealed that extraversion was the key quality of Erin Gruwell. In addition, Erin Gruwell also had intriguing behaviors, attitudes, and habits based on her personality and role.

KEYWORDS: *Character Analysis, Erin Gruwell, Movie Character.*

INTRODUCTION

A character in a narrative piece of art is a person or other being, such as a novel, play, television series, or film. The main characters or other characters in a film play various roles. Ginting and Suryani (2022) mention that the main characters, who often serve as the protagonists, typically possess multiple character traits. Each of these traits plays a crucial role in shaping the audience's perception and emotions towards the character. As Sarajar et al. (2021) propose that character education can be instilled in students through various avenues, such as their personal experiences, guidance from parents and teachers, and exposure to positive role models depicted in movies or observed in real life. Thamrin and Wargika (2013) state that major and small characters are present in the majority of movies, and they always play a crucial role in influencing the viewer. According to Chatman as cited in Hasanah et al. (2018), character analysis involves



examining how human nature manifests itself in people's behavior and manner through the use of narrative elements. Fasikh and Indriyana (2022) also describe that a character is a device for generating and engraving, an imprint, a stamp, a distinctive mark, or something that makes a person unique. Characters are the foundation of a plot in the literature. Character analysis allows us to examine closely a character to learn more about their personality, connections, and plot function.

Barowski (2021) stated that character analysis is a thorough evaluation of the relationships between characters in a literary work and how they relate to the plots and other characters. Character relationships, physical characteristics, and internal problems are all taken into account in the typical character analysis. According to Goldsmith (2023), most character analyses concentrate on the character's conflict within the text's narrative. The researcher may take into account what or who the character is battling, and whether this conflict gives the character a static or dynamic aspect.

As indicated by the preceding argument, personalities are formed by human habits and told in films. The character of Erin Gruwell in the movie directed by LaGravenese (2007) is based on real-life incidents. She is well educated, courageous, attractive, middle-class, non-ethnic, stylish, and intelligent. She works hard to be a good teacher for her students and does not give up until they improve. She appears to know nothing about their daily existence on the streets, and she genuinely expects her students to participate in class, which makes them dislike her. She organizes extraordinary events for her class, provides gifts and excursions, and keeps working with students whom everyone else has lost faith. She deviates from the norm because unlike other instructors and even students, she never gives up on a person. With the backdrop described above in mind, the study would want to explore the character further using the formation, attitude, or behaviors displayed in the movie "Freedom Writers".

Several studies have been carried out concerning the character of Erin Gruwell. A study by Leihitu and Triprihatmini (2021) investigate the politeness strategies used by Erin Gruwell in Freedom Writers. The study found that Erin Gruwell used four politeness strategies, consisting of bald-on record, off-record, negative politeness, and positive politeness. Gruwell mostly used positive politeness, as she wanted to get closer to the listener and satisfy the listener's face. Another study by Rahman (2021) focused on the role of Erin Gruwell as an educator in Freedom Writers. The study revealed that a teacher ought to look into subjects relevant to students' daily lives. By utilizing a variety of teaching methods, a good English teacher should develop certain strategies for their students' learning process. The instructional method depicted in the movie was authentic material. Setiawan and Kuntjara (2017) examined the speech styles used by Erin Gruwell in the movie. The study found that Gruwell utilized both the co-operative

feature of female speech styles and the aggressive feature of male speech styles dominantly, as seen in the class scenes.


The purpose of this study was to conduct an analysis on Erin Gruwell, a character from the movie titled "Freedom Writers", with the goals of exploring her personality, examining her salient traits, and learning interesting information about her. The study used a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the character, and categorized it into ten groups based on personalities and roles. This study's significance lies in its contribution to the field of movie literature. By examining the personality and traits of Erin Gruwell, this study hopes to provide insights into how fictional characters are constructed and how their personalities and roles contribute to the narrative of a story. This study's categorization of characters based on personality and role can also serve as a useful framework for understanding other characters in literature and films. In addition, this study can be valuable to writers, filmmakers, and literary scholars seeking to create more complex and realistic characters. By providing a detailed analysis of a character's personality traits, this study can serve as a model for creating more compelling and believable characters in their work. Overall, the study of character analysis in the literature is important as it provides insights into the human condition and enriches our understanding of the world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

CHARACTERS

In literature, a character is the embodiment of a particular personality and is used to represent the various personalities that exist in society. As Khairunas et al. (2018) state, the most overt literary representation of a person within a broader imagined situation is through their character. Additionally Khairunas et al. (2018) argue that a story typically features one or more of these personalities among its many other characters. The main or dominant character may be one or more of these. Djasi (2008, p. 28) notes that a movie or story's primary character is its most crucial component; without it, the film would be meaningless. Characters can occasionally be other than humans, such as animals, plants, robots, toys, or aliens, but the author still provides the human abilities and characteristics that are important to the plot.

Hamilton (2022) mentions that there are 11 different kinds of fictional characters by role. Those are major characters such as **protagonist** (the lead serving as the focal point of a story) and **antagonist** (mainly antagonistic character in relation to the protagonist). Some minor characters consist of **antihero** (e.g. a noble figure people rooting for who also lacks moral integrity), **guide** (the individual who gives the protagonist something of value, such as instruction, knowledge, support, or tangible



items), **contagonist** (a strong and frequently significant figure), **sidekicks** (additional characters that aid or assist the protagonist in some manner), and **henchmen** (the henchmen give the protagonist conflict, but it's not as severe or challenging to conquer as the main antagonist). There are also **love interest** (one who causes main character, as well as the viewers, to experience more intense feelings), **temptress** (one who provides phony affection and assurances in contrast to the love interest, who gives the protagonist genuine advice and comfort), **confidant** (a character who the protagonist has one of the story's strongest connections with), and **foil** (a character who fully contrasts the protagonist in terms of personality and outlook).

Further, Hamilton (2022) also adds that each character has four different types that can be used in any position: **dynamic** (one who undergoes change from one point in the narrative to the next), **static** (throughout the majority of the narrative, a static character does not change), **stock** (those who play out predetermined parts or stereotypical character traits to advance the plot), and **symbolic** (characters who lend support to a theme). In addition, Kittelstad (2021) mentions **round** (the character with a complicated personality) and **flat** (the reverse of a round character) to the types of characters in fiction. Additionally, Lawani (2011, as cited in Khairunas et al., 2018) adds **underdog**, a character who is frequently underplayed in books, such as the victim or the person whom everyone would have put their bets against in any given circumstance.

The above explanations provide an overview of various fictional characters and their roles in literature. Major characters, such as protagonists and antagonists, drive the plot forward, while minor characters, such as sidekicks and confidants, support and complement the main characters. Understanding the different types of characters and their functions can help writers create well-rounded, compelling stories that engage readers. Eder (2010) affirms that when analyzing characters, it is frequently sensible to start with the traits, relationships, and actions that define them as members of a fictional society. Our perception of characters as thinking, feeling, and active beings is the most crucial factor in how we view them.

PERSONALITY TRAITS

In terms of personality traits, people have innate methods for handling various circumstances and interacting with their surroundings. The way to interact with someone most effectively and the duties and responsibilities they are ideal for can both be determined by knowing something about their personality (Ali, 2019). According to Soto (2018), personality trait learning is defined as a distinct and consistent pattern of thoughts, emotions, and actions that tends to remain stable over time and in different relevant circumstances. Diener et al. (2019) describe that personality traits reveal a person's unique thought, feeling, and behavior characteristics. An individual with a high

extraversion score is likely to exhibit sociable behavior in a variety of situations throughout time. Diener et al. (2019) also add that personality traits indicate stability and consistency, and thus, the core tenet of trait psychology is that people vary from one another according to how they rank on a set of universally valid trait dimensions across situations and time.

Hans Eysenck, a prominent psychologist, developed the PEN model, a biological theory of personality. There are three major personality traits emphasized by the model: psychoticism, extraversion, and neuroticism (PEN) (Waude, 2017). Extraverted people are more likely to participate in social activities, regularly converse, and feel particularly at ease in social settings. Because they enjoy the spotlight, extroverts often have a bigger social circle of friends and contacts. On a spectrum, extraversion is evaluated from high (extrovert) to low (introvert) (Guarino, 2018; Waude, 2017). A second component is emotional stability or neuroticism. Higher levels of stress and anxiety are correlated with higher neuroticism scores. They expound on the importance of problems, obsess over insignificant details, and struggle to cope with pressures (Guarino, 2018; Waude, 2017). The third psychological trait is between normality (low psychoticism) and high psychoticism. Individuals with higher psychosis are more likely to act rashly or without proper consideration. These people can also defy social norms and act out of character due to a desire for quick pleasure, irrespective of the consequences (Guarino, 2018; Waude, 2017).

Thus, it can be concluded that Hans Eysenck's PEN model concerns with three major personality traits: neuroticism, extraversion, and psychoticism. Extraverted individuals are more socially inclined and feel more comfortable in social situations, whereas introverted individuals are more reserved. Neuroticism is associated with higher levels of stress and anxiety, and individuals with high scores on this trait may find it difficult to handle stressors. Psychoticism, the most recent addition to the model, refers to a person's tendency to engage in reckless or unconventional behavior. This model provides a useful framework for understanding and assessing individual differences in personality, which can have implications for a variety of domains including mental health, education, and the workplace.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study examined Erin Gruwell's personality through a descriptive research method, using established theories and carefully analyzing the movie "Freedom Writers". Linguistic and literary resources were used in the study, and data analysis was a crucial step in achieving the objectives of the study. The data collection procedures of the study included watching the movie, comprehending the plot, and writing about the

Erin Gruwell. The study analyzed the movie character in several stages using the Eysenck theory to identify Erin Gruwell's primary character traits.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section discusses the findings of the study. The following Table 1 summarizes the characterization of the role "Erin Gruwell" in the movie "Freedom Writers".

TABLE 1. The characterization based on role

No	Character	The scene time	Dialogues
1.	Protagonist	0:32:47 0:35:06	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>You do not feel respected is that what you were said, Eva? Well, maybe you were not. But to get respect, you have to gave it.</i> - <i>You all think you was gone make it to graduation like this?</i> - <i>You knew what was gone happen when you die? You were gone rot in the ground and people were gone went on lived, and they were gone forgot all about you, and when you rot, do you think it was gone matter whether you were an original gangster? You were dead, and nobody is gone want remember you, because all you left behind in this world is this, you were raising your hand.</i> - <i>Raise your hand if you knew what the Holocaust was (everyone raises their hand, except for Ben)</i>
2.	Round	0:18:49 1:16:27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>I can not believe he brought up my salary. What is happened to him? He was like Atticus Finch to me when I was growing up, and now he is talking about salaries? I think he is playing too much golf. In fact, I think he needs an intervention. Why is not being a teacher good enough for him?</i> - <i>Hi! Sorry I am late. Did you eat? I am ordering in. Are you hungry?</i> - <i>Of course I can.</i> - <i>Normal kids? Yes, they are. They are reading The Diary of Anne Frank. They are learning vocabulary, grammar, writing, poetry.</i>

To disclose the character of Erin Gruwell in the film Freedom Writer, the authors looked for it in the dialogues and analyzed her character. The study employed the characteristics of Hans Eysenck's PEN model toward Erin Gruwell, to describe her habits, attitudes, behaviors, and traits.

TABLE 2. Character analysis of Erin Gruwell

No	Character	The scene time	Dialogues
1.	The most dominant character (Extraversion)	0:04:53	- <i>Well, actually, I chose Wilson because of the integration program. I think what is happening here is really exciting, do not you? My father was involved in the civil rights movement. And I remember when I was watching the LA riots on TV, I was thinking of going to law school at the time. And I thought, "God, by the time. You are defending a kid in a courtroom, the battle's already lost. I think the real fighting should happen here in the classroom.</i>
		0:14:19	- <i>Settle down. Let's go over the first name on the list, Homer's The Odyssey.</i> - <i>No, this Homer was an ancient Greek, but maybe he was bald just like Homer Simpsons. Okay.</i>
		0:20:03	- <i>I have this idea. We are gonna be convering poetry. Who here likes Tupac Shakur?</i> - <i>Tupac Shakur. Excuse me. Raise your hand. Really? I thought there had be more fans. I have the lyrics to this song printed out. I want you to listen to this phrase I have up on the board. It is an example of an internal rhyme. What he does is very sophisticated and cool, actually</i>
		0:21:13	- <i>No, it is not that. See, what I was trying to do.</i> - <i>All right, Jamal, enough. Jamal! That is enough! You know what? I want you to move to this front seat right here now.</i>
		0:41:12	- <i>Come on. I am sick of these antics in my classroom.</i> - <i>We are gonna play a game, all right? It is a lot of fun. I promise. Look, you can either sit in your seats reading those workbooks, or you can play a game. Either way, you are in here till the bell rings. Okay. This is called the Line Game. I am gonna ask you a question. If that question applies to you, you step onto the line, and then step back away for the next question. Easy, right?</i>

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- *The first question, how many of you have the new Snoop Dogg album?*
 - *Okay, back away. Next question, how many of you have seen Boyz the Hood? Okay. Next question. How many of you live in the projects?... How many of you have been in juvenile hall or jail for any length of time? How many of you know where to get drugs right now? How many of you know someone in a gang? How many of you are gang members?*
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The following table contains fascinating information about Erin Gruwell, beginning with her attitudes, habits, and ways of behaving while portraying her character in Freedom Writers.


TABLE 3. The fascinating information of Erin Gruwell

No	Character	The scene time	Dialogues
1.	The fascinating character (psychoticism)	0:12:00	Brian : You saw a little action today, I hear. Erin : <i>Yeah. It happened so fast.</i> Brian : Well, do not be discouraged. You put your time in, In a few years, you will be able to teach juniors. They are a pleasure. By then, most of your kids will be gone anyway. Erin : What do you mean? Brian : Well, eventually, they just stop coming. Erin : <i>Well, if I do my job, they might be lining up at the door. Right?</i> Brian : Yeah.
		0:56:56	Dr. Cohn : Ms Gruwell, there are a system in place. Based on years of running an educational facility. You have to follow that system. Erin : <i>No. I will not. Look, I was just trying to do my job here. What the point of a voluntary integration program if the kids making it to high school have a 5th grade reading level?</i>

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- Carl : I enforced that program.
- Erin : *With all due respect, all that program was do ware housing these kids Until they were old enough to disappear.*
- Dr. Cohn : Look, I appreciate your intentions, But there was nothing I can do on a class-by-class basis.
- Erin : *Dr. Cohn, why should they waste their time showing up. When they knew were wasting our time teaching them? We tell them, "Go to school. Get an education. "And then we say, "Well, they cannot learner, so let was not waste resources. "I thinking trips. Most of them have never been outside of Long Beach. They have not been gave the opportunity to expand their thinking about what out there for them. And they were hungry for it. I know it, and it was purely a reward system. They will not get anything they have not earned By doing their work and upping their grades.*
- Dr. Cohn : But if Ms. Campbell Will not gave you books because of budget restrictions, She was not gone approve school trips.
- Erin : *I will raise the money. I just need to know, I will not meet resistance. See, I cannot promise them anything. I cannot deliver. It only proves what they already believe, all I said was, Ms. Campbell did not need to be bothered.*

- 0:40:45
- *Okay, now I gone ask you a more serious question. Stand on the line if you have lost a friend to gang violence. Stay on the line if you have lost more than one friend. Three. Four or more. Okay, I had liked us to pay respect to those people now. Wherever you were, just speak their name.*
 - *You can write about whatever you want, the past, the present, the future. You can write it like a diary, or you can write songs, poems, any good thing, bad thing, anything. But you have to write every day. Keep a pen nearby.*
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In the previous discussion, the authors explained how this study related to the theory employed. This section clarifies how the study was conducted in collaboration with a theory known as it serves as the foundation for studies. After watching the movie, the



authors discovered that Erin Gruwell was a protagonist and a well-rounded character based on personality. According to Eysenk's PEN model, people can better understand each person's character traits in the environment and character traits that already exist. In addition, Erin Gruwell, the main character and protagonist, also provided proof; the behavior she exhibited demonstrated that she was calm, brave, and did not like inequalities. She also had a nice demeanor.

The findings also revealed that Erin Gruwell possessed three characteristics (psychoticism, extraversion, and neuroticism), among others, based on the most salient traits. The most distinct character in the movie was extraversion. By viewing the movie and analyzing Erin Gruwell's dialogue, the authors determined the nature. By examining and describing the characters' speech and actions, the author inferred that the character was warm, decisive, brave, active, creative, and dynamic. All the information provided serves as proof that people's conduct has an impact on the environment.


Erin Gruwell piqued the authors' interest because of her attempts to be a great educator for her students and the way that she persisted until her student performance improved. When she first started teaching, the students even got into a fight, and ultimately, the majority fled the class. Many teachers felt unhappy in this environment, and decided that it would be best to resign. However, Erin Gruwell attempted to teach despite the situations. The students had lack of curiosity and even seemed insulted; yet, Erin Gruwell still persisted in teaching.

CONCLUSIONS

This study focused on the character of Erin Gruwell, the protagonist of the movie "Freedom Writers". The authors examined Gruwell's character from various perspectives, including her character roles, personality traits, and personality characteristics. The authors identified Erin Gruwell as a well-rounded character with a nice disposition, was brave, and disliked differences. The authors also determined that Gruwell's most prominent personality traits were psychoticism, extraversion, and neuroticism. What makes Erin Gruwell interesting was her great efforts to be a great teacher towards her students and her persistence in helping them improve despite the challenging environment. The authors noted that personality could be formed by a person's attitudes and habits in their daily environment. Overall, Erin Gruwell was a protagonist who displayed good behavior, intelligence, wisdom, and non-racism. This study hopes to provide insights into the importance of character analysis in understanding the impact of behavior on the surrounding environment.

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