



SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS WHO ARE CHANGING OUR WORLD

Erin Merryn: Finding the Power to Speak Your Truth

ROBERT F. KENNEDY HUMAN RIGHTS

Based on the book by KERRY KENNEDY
Photography by EDDIE ADAMS and ARCHITECTS OF PEACE
Containing excerpts from the play *Speak Truth To Power: Voices from Beyond the Dark* by ARIEL DORFMAN
ROBERT F. KENNEDY HUMAN RIGHTS

KERRY KENNEDY

Open these pages to a world of courage and hope, where students learn about social justice principles and how and where they are grounded in international and domestic law. Beyond theory, students are provided with a tool kit for action, so they, too, can create change in the classroom, community, country, and our shared world. Our aim is for every student who uses this material to abandon the role of bystander and, instead, join today's heroes as a human rights defender.

In a world where there is a common lament that there are no more heroes, too often cynicism and despair are perceived as evidence of the death of moral courage. That perception is wrong. People of great valor and heart, committed to noble purpose, with long records of personal sacrifice, walk among us in every country of the world. I spent two years traveling the globe to interview fifty-one individuals from nearly forty countries and five continents. In these pages, and in the play by Ariel Dorfman, you will find people whose lives are filled with extraordinary feats of bravery. I've listened to them speak about the quality and nature of courage, and in their stories I found hope and inspiration, a vision of a better world.

For many of these heroes, their understanding of the abrogation of human rights has been profoundly shaped by their personal experiences: of death threats, imprisonment, and in some cases, bodily harm. However, this is not, by any measure, a compilation of victims. Rather, courage, with its affirmation of possibility and change, is what defines them, singly and together. Each spoke to me with compelling eloquence of the causes to which they have devoted their lives, and for which they are willing to sacrifice them—from freedom of expression to the rule of law; from environmental defense to eradicating bonded labor; from access to capital to the right to due process; from women's rights to religious liberty. As the Mandelas, Gandhis, and Maathais of their countries, these leaders hold in common an inspiring record of accomplishment and a profound capacity to ignite change.

The defenders' own voices provoke fundamental questions: Why

do people who face imprisonment, torture, and death continue to pursue their work when the chance of success is so remote and the personal consequences so grave? Why did they become involved? What keeps them going? From where do they derive their strength and inspiration? How do they overcome fear? How do they measure success? Out of the answers emerges a sympathetic and strength-giving portrait of the power of personal resolve in the face of injustice. These voices are, most of all, a call to action, much needed because human rights violations often occur by cover of night, in remote and dark places. For many who suffer, isolation is their worst enemy, and exposure of atrocities their only hope. We must bring the international spotlight to violations and broaden the community of those who know and care about those who suffer. This alone may well stop a disappearance, cancel a torture session, or even, some day, save a life. Included with each story is a resource guide of contact information for the defenders and their organizations in the hope that you, the reader, will take action, send a donation, ask for more information, get involved. The more that voices are raised in protest, the greater the likelihood of change.

I grew up in the Judeo-Christian tradition—we painted our prophets on ceilings and sealed our saints in stained glass. But here on earth, people like these and countless other defenders are living, breathing human beings. Their determination, valor, and commitment in the face of overwhelming danger challenge each of us to take up the torch for a more decent society. Today we are blessed by the presence of certain people who are gifts from God. They are teachers who show us not how to be saints, but how to be fully human. Indeed, the project, has been developed by educators to whom we are profoundly grateful.

Onward,
Kerry Kennedy
President, Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights

WHAT ARE HUMAN RIGHTS?

Human rights are the rights a person has simply because she or he is a human being. Human rights are held by all persons equally, universally, and forever. Human rights are inalienable: you cannot lose these rights any more than you can cease being a human being. Human rights are indivisible: you cannot be denied a right because it is "less important" or "non-essential." Human rights are interdependent: all human rights are part of a complementary framework. For example, your ability to participate in your government is directly affected by your right to express yourself, to get an education, and even to obtain the necessities of life.

Another definition of human rights is those basic standards without which people cannot live with dignity. To violate someone's human rights is to treat that person as though she or he were not a human being. To advocate human rights is to demand that the human dignity of all people be respected. In claiming these human rights, everyone also accepts the responsibility not to infringe on the rights of others and to support those whose rights are abused or denied.

Human rights are both inspirational and practical. Human rights principles hold up the vision of a free, just, and peaceful world and set minimum standards for how individuals and institutions everywhere should treat people. Human rights also empower people with a framework for action when those minimum standards are not met, for people still have human rights, even if the laws or those in power do not recognize or protect them.

We experience our human rights every day when we worship according to our beliefs, or choose not to worship at all; when we debate and criticize government policies; when we join a trade union; or when we travel to other parts of the country or overseas. Although we usually take these actions for granted, people both here in America and in other countries do not enjoy all these liberties equally. Human rights violations occur when a parent abuses a child; when a family is homeless; when a school provides inadequate education; when women are paid less than men; or when one person steals from another. Human rights are an everyday issue.

THE PROJECT: SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER

Speak Truth To Power, a project of Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, is a multi-faceted, global initiative that uses the experiences of courageous defenders from around the world to educate students and others about human rights and urge them to take action. Issues range from slavery and environmental activism to religious self-determination and political participation.

Speak Truth To Power began as a book written by Kerry Kennedy (since translated into seven languages) and has been adapted into a dramatic production by Ariel Dorfman. The portraits of the human rights defenders by the late Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Eddie Adams featured in the book have been made into an exhibition that has toured more than twenty cities in the United States after its debut at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. It is now displayed on four continents.

The Speak Truth To Power human rights education curriculum has been taught to millions of students in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the United States.

Hosted by President Bill Clinton, the play, *Speak Truth To Power: Voices from Beyond the Dark*, premiered at the Kennedy Center in 2000. A one-hour video was broadcast on PBS as part of its Great

Performances Series. Many of our greatest actors have performed in the play, including: Alec Baldwin, Glenn Close, John Malkovich, Sean Penn, Vanessa Redgrave, Martin Sheen, and Meryl Streep. The play has been produced across the United States and performed by major actors in capitals around the world. Notable was a performance in Doha, Qatar, transmitted live on the Arab news network Al Jazeera and read by ten of the most celebrated actors and singers of the Arab world. It has also been performed by school children, college students, local heroes, and even prisoners. In 2014, at the European Union in Brussels, several Members of the European Parliament, including Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament, performed the play.

Speak Truth To Power encourages governments, NGOs, major foundations, and individuals to support human rights, and brings much-needed attention to continuing abuses. But perhaps its most lasting effect will be to demonstrate the capacity of each individual to create change.

John Heffernan
Executive Director, Speak Truth To Power

BECOME A DEFENDER

Everyone can become a defender, whether you have one day or an entire academic year. Following are a few examples of how you can support students in their efforts to be defenders.

TIPS:

Have a strategy:

- Identify the problem to be addressed.
- Research the problem: Why is this a problem, what solutions have been tried (some of this will have been covered in the lesson)?
- What change is required?
- Define actions steps and specific target audiences—who can make the change happen?
- How can the group involve other supporters?
- How will the impact of the group's efforts be measured?

1 DAY: If you have one day to take action, select an action that is simple and focused, such as writing letters or organizing an information day in your school.

1 WEEK: If you have a week to take action, focus on an event or program that builds over the week from awareness to action.

FOR EXAMPLE:

Organize a week for effecting change. Over the course of the week, begin by educating your target community on the issue and then provide a series of actions people can take.

1 SEMESTER: If you have a term to take action, build a program that integrates your classroom learning with a comprehensive, multi-layered project. Consider designing a human rights-based service learning project.

ERIN MERRYIN

At age six, Erin experienced sexual abuse for the first time by a neighbor at a friend's sleepover. Just a few weeks shy of her seventh birthday in 1992, Erin was raped by the same person. Threatened and scared, Erin went to bed every night crying, having nightmares, afraid to tell anyone what had happened to her. When she moved, at the age of eight, she thought her suffering was finally over; however, that wasn't the case. She was repeatedly sexually abused and threatened in the same way by a family member from ages eleven to thirteen. Despite these years of trials, she began a crusade her senior year of high school, in 2004, to end the silence and shame around sexual abuse. After turning her childhood diary into a book called *Stolen Innocence*, which she began writing in at age eleven, she started speaking at high schools, colleges, sexual assault centers, child abuse conferences, and community events. Her mission is to take the shame off of victims of sexual abuse and empower them to speak up against it, and to educate the public about the frequent abuse that children experience everywhere. In January of 2010, Erin initially drafted a law called "Erin's Law" which was first signed into Illinois Law on Feb 14, 2011 and is passed in over half of the country. Erin's Law requires public schools to implement an age-appropriate prevention-oriented child sexual abuse program for children in pre-K through 12th grade. This includes education on safe touch, unsafe touch, safe secrets, unsafe secrets, and how to get away from and report abuse. Erin has also written three books, which recount her painful experiences and focus on self-discovery, empowerment and forgiveness to help other victims overcome the traumas that they have suffered and to live fearlessly.



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**“BE A VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS.
LEAD OTHERS TO BREAK
THEIR SILENCE AND
RECLAIM THEIR VOICE.”**

ERIN INTERVIEWED BY KATIE COURIC ON HER SHOW “KATIE,” MARCH 2013

KC: And as my next guest knows, millions of girls need help right here at home. By the age of 14, 1 in 4 girls in this country will be sexually abused. It happened to Erin Merryn before she reached elementary school. As a little girl Erin Merryn hid a secret behind her smile. At the age of 6 while at a sleepover, she was sexually abused by her childhood friend's relative.

EM: I can remember that day as if it happened yesterday. The toys on the floor, the look in his eyes, the color shirt he was wearing.

KC: The abuse took place repeatedly until she was 8 years old. And then when she was 11 it happened again. This time, at the hands of her older relative. Confused and afraid, Erin stood silent for years.

EM: I didn't have the language to tell anybody what he had done. It went on from ages 11, 12, 13 on Thanksgiving, Christmas, any opportunity that he could get.

KC: She continued to suffer in silence until one day her younger sister revealed that she too had been sexually abused.

EM: My younger sister, my best friend, 11 years old, turned to me and said, "Brian's gross." I knew exactly what that meant. My innocence was killed, my trust was taken but I reclaimed my voice and I want every survivor of sexual abuse to do the same.

KC: At the age of 25, Erin proposed a bill requiring schools to educate students about sexual abuse. Erin's Law made headlines around the world and has been passed in 5 states. This year, 11 more states will consider legislation.

EM: I will not stop getting this passed in every single state. I don't want another generation, another century of children to not be educated on this very important issue.

KC: You know Erin, watching that tape, you think 1 in 4 girls under the age of 18 is sexually abused in this country, but I still have a hard time wrapping my head around how this happened to you and your sister. Are people shocked when they hear this story?

EM: They are, people often don't realize this is going on behind closed doors. You know we don't want to look at the issue and realize I could be sexually abused twice by two people I trusted, I knew.

KC: You did tell your parents when you were 13 years old what had happened to you in that period of time but it took you until you were 22 to tell them that when you were 6, 7, 8 the same thing had happened.

EM: I saw how devastated my parents were when they found out my sister and I were being sexually abused by a family member. My mother cried night after night, feeling like she failed as a parent. In my heart, there was no way I could say Mom, somebody else did this to me. So I kept it a secret and it wasn't until I was in college, suffered for 4 years with anorexia, and I finally realized I had to tell them what had happened to me as a child.

KC: And you have become a huge activist for education. Tell me about Erin's Law, what it's designed to do and how far you've come already.

EM: Erin's Law requires sexual abuse prevention, preschool through 12th grade, requiring that we teach children safe touch, unsafe touch, safe secrets, unsafe secrets, How to Get Away, How to Tell Today, the areas that are covered by your swimsuit – no one ever touches you there. And my message is we have to protect and give kids a voice, so I decided we need a change and every state needs this law. And currently I'm going state to state getting this law passed. It's been passed in 5* states and I got 11 more introducing it.

KC: It's really wonderful what you've been able to accomplish so far, I know you were honored at the Glamor Women of the Year for all your incredible activism. We met there, and I was so proud of you and your spirit and your desire to protect all the kids in the ways that you were not protected as a little girl. So Erin Merryn, we salute you.

**Since the time of this interview, Erin's Law has been passed in additional states*

FINDING THE POWER TO SPEAK YOUR TRUTH ERIN MERRYN

LESSON GRADE LEVEL: 9–12
HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE: SEXUAL VIOLENCE,
PERSONAL SECURITY

OVERVIEW:

Erin’s powerful story is one of a young woman who ended her silence as a victim and now speaks out against sexual abuse. Strong-willed and resilient, Erin was able to overcome her traumatic experiences as a child and transform them in a way that not only forgives, but empowers others to speak up and speak out through the creation of Erin’s law.

The following lessons address different aspects of Erin’s story. Depending on what is relevant and appropriate for your students, you might choose to teach either one or both of these lessons.

LESSON 1: Focuses on how Erin transformed a traumatic experience into a force for the greater good through the establishment of Erin’s law.

LESSON 2: Fosters students’ basic understanding of sexual abuse while incorporating strategies for differentiating between appropriate and inappropriate relationships/behaviors.

NOTE TO TEACHERS: When addressing a topic such as sexual abuse, be particularly aware of how your students react and be prepared to provide personal support and/or intervention if necessary. Have resources available, such as names and contact numbers for help lines, support organizations, health educators, counselors, and psychologists in case a student would feel more comfortable seeking help elsewhere. If possible, it may be more useful to have a specialist join you in teaching the lesson. Additionally, it is important that teachers act with sensitivity and discretion when handling personal information from students. You may want to consult with the principal about your school district’s mandating reporting laws.

TIME REQUIREMENT: 90–180 minutes

OBJECTIVES:

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Better understand own personal boundaries
- Understand what sexual abuse is
- Begin to identify signs of sexual abuse and how to support someone experiencing sexual abuse
- Understand the challenges that come with addressing socially stigmatized issues
- Understand how one might take direct action on behalf of and in support of victims of abuse
- Understand how Erin turned her traumatic experience into positive action

STUDENT SKILLS:

- Drawing inferences
- Making conclusions
- Organizing and interpreting information
- Inquiry and critical thinking
- Group discussion

COMMON CORE STANDARDS:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1a
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1b
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1c
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1d
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.2
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.3
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.4
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.5
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.6

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What is sexual abuse?
- What does a healthy relationship look like?
- What can you do when you or someone you know is experiencing abuse?
- What can we learn from Erin’s story to help support others to overcome personal trauma?
- How does Erin and her life inspire others to take action?

VOCABULARY:

- Sexual Abuse
- Sexual Assault
- Consent
- Victim
- Survivor
- Empowerment
- Resilient

MATERIALS:

- T/F Questions
- Statistics Sheet
- Scenario Cards
- Erin Merryn’s interview with Katie Couric: www.ErinMerryn.net
- “Finding Your Voice Against Gender Violence” TED talk: https://www.ted.com/talks/meera_vijayann_find_your_voice_against_gender_violence
- “Violence Against Women – It’s a Men’s Issue” video: https://www.ted.com/talks/jackson_katz_violence_against_women_it_s_a_men_s_issue
- Violence Against Women worksheet: <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/TED-Talk-Lesson-Violence-Against-Women-Its-a-Mens-Issue-2829091>
- Erin Merryn discusses the power of Forgiveness:
 - www.youtube.com/watch?v=dlw2RyruZRM
 - www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Zi00Eu2JGE

NOTE TO TEACHERS: Be prepared to answer questions your students may have in-depth. Refer to www.nationwidechildrens.org/sexual-abuse-education-tools for extensive information about sexual abuse.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

ANTICIPATORY SET:

Understanding Sexual Assault

- Read the T/F questions to your students aloud.
- Have students answer each question then go over the correct answers as a class.
- Review facts from the statistics sheet with your class.
- Ask students the following questions:
 - Which facts were most surprising?
 - Which facts were least surprising?
 - Are there any words that you’d like clarified?
- Introduce vocabulary words and discuss as a class.

NOTE TO TEACHERS: Is it very important to emphasize that victims are NEVER to blame.

PART 1

ACTIVITY 1: ERIN’S STORY + EMPOWERMENT

- Review Erin’s story with the class and show Erin’s interview with Katie Couric: www.erinmerryn.net
- In an open discussion, ask the class:
 - How do you think Erin was able to use her negative experience as fuel to do something positive?
 - Do you think implementing something like Erin’s Law in all schools will be helpful for students?
- Play the video “Finding Your Voice Against Gender Violence”:
www.ted.com/talks/meera_vijayann_nd_your_voice_against_gender_violence?language=en
- Ask students to journal about/discuss the following questions:
 - How can speaking up about abuse or any other violation of one’s human rights be empowering?
 - Why it is so important to speak up if they or someone they know is experiencing sexual violence or abuse?
 - What could they say to someone they know who has experienced sexual violence or abuse?
 - What might be difficult about speaking up in that way?
 - Ask if students would like to share a time when they or someone they knew, stood up for something or someone.

**This doesn’t have to be related to sexual abuse and can be on a small scale.*

PART 2

ACTIVITY 1: IDENTIFYING SEXUAL ASSAULT + SETTING BOUNDARIES

- Cut out the Scenario Cards. Feel free to add or change any scenarios that may seem more relevant to your class.
- Pace cards in order, “Harmless”, “Disrespectful”, “Sexual Assault”, along classroom wall or white board.
- Count off your class into groups and hand them a scenario card.
- Allow students to discuss where they think their card should land on the continuum. Once they’ve come to a collaborative decision, have them tape their scenario wherever they see it.
- Start at the beginning of the board and go over each scenario. Ask the group why they chose that position, and open up discussion to the rest of the class.
- By the end of the activity your students will gain better understanding of sexual abuse/harassment and personal boundaries.

ACTIVITY 2: UNDERSTANDING SEXUAL ASSAULT + ROLE OF BYSTANDER

- Watch Violence Against Women - It’s a Men’s Issue: www.ted.com/talks/jackson_katz_violence_against_women_it_s_a_men_s_issue?language=en
- Hand out Violence Against Women worksheet: www.jacksonkatz.com/PDF/1VAW.pdf
 - Have students read through article in its entirety.
 - Ask students to look over the study guide questions and make notes before discussing with the class.

ACTIVITY 3: ERIN’S FORGIVENESS

- Play either one or both of these videos on Erin Merryn and forgiveness:
 - www.youtube.com/watch?v=dlw2RyruZRM
 - www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Zi00Eu2JGE
- How was Erin able to use forgiveness as part of her healing process?
- Have you ever been in a situation where you decided to forgive someone so that you could move on?

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES:

- **Meditation: Loving-Kindness:** If you decide to incorporate forgiveness into the lesson, this meditation is useful for centering students and is a method of developing compassion. Some students may not have experience with meditation or any type of centering activity. Encourage them to open themselves up to this experience. www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree/loving-kindness
- Marina Pisklakova’s lesson on Domestic Violence: www.rfkhumanrights.org / click on Speak Truth to Power / click on “Defenders” tab.

Since the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations (UN) in 1948, many other international documents—also called treaties, covenants, resolutions, or conventions—have been drafted to develop these rights further. Countries commit to protect the rights recognized in these treaties by ‘ratifying’ them and sometimes a specific institution is created within the UN to monitor their compliance.

Here are examples of relevant international documents:

- **CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (CRC)**
 - **Article 2:** Protection from discrimination of any kind
 - **Article 19:** Protection from all forms of violence
 - **Article 34:** Protection from sexual exploitation
- **INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS (ICESCR)**
- **CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT (CAT)**
- **CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW)**

For more information, visit the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights’ website: www.ohchr.org

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Healthy Relationships

waves.gmu.edu/healthy-relationships/

A resource that identifies what a healthy relationship looks like and how to maintain healthy relationships

Take Action Against Abuse

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/17/fact-sheet-resource-guide-and-recent-efforts-combat-sexual-violence>

Created by the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, this website lists resources to reduce dating violence against students, teens and young women

Committee for Children

<http://www.cfchildren.org>

CFC is non-profit working globally to promote children’s socialemotional and academic success

International Center for Assault Prevention

www.internationalcap.org

ICAP empowers communities worldwide to help keep their children safe from peer assault, abduction and known adult assault

Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP)

www.mvpnglobal.org

MVP is a leadership program co-created by Jackson Katz that focuses on preventing all forms of men’s violence against women

The Clothesline Project

www.clotheslineproject.org

This project is a vehicle for women affected by violence to express their emotions

Go to www.erinmerryn.net/erins-law.html and see if your state has passed Erin’s Law.

- 1 If your state has passed Erin’s Law, send a thank you note to your government officials and ask how the law is being implemented.
 - a. Remember, passage of a law is step one and implementing the law is step 2!
- 2 If your state has not passed Erin’s Law:
 - a. Host a Sexual Abuse Awareness Day at your school and have the whole community sign a petition to pass the law. Invite members of the community, survivors, therapists, support groups and agencies.
 - b. Set up a table at local stores and/or coffee shops, educate your community about Erin’s Law and have community members sign your petition to government officials to pass the law.
- 3 Other actions you can take:
 - a. Hold a public gathering to raise awareness of the issue and the silence that surrounds it, invite everyone to light a candle.
 - b. Invite guest speakers on therapy for survivors (or other topics).
 - c. Create a place where people can write messages of forgiveness.

Take Back the Night

www.takebackthenight.org

Take Back the Night seeks to end sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual abuse and all other forms of sexual violence by creating safe communities and respectful relationships through awareness events and initiatives

The Arts Effect / SLUT The Play

<http://theartseffectnyc.com/slut-the-play-2/>

Created by The Arts Effect, SLUT is a powerful play and guidebook cowritten by students that combats sexism and sexual violence

Become a Defender

<http://rfkhumanrights.org/what-we-do/speak-truth-power/become-defender/>

This resource serves as a useful tool to help students take action on any human rights issue that inspires them

An Unimaginable Act: Overcoming & Preventing Child Abuse Through Erin’s Law

Merryn, Erin. (2013) Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc.

Erin Merryn’s third book which gives an in-depth, personal account of Erin’s story and how - through using positive outlets - she was able to rebuild her life and heal from a childhood filled with sexual abuse
**This book is a strong segue into topics that are discussed in this lesson including resilience, overcoming obstacles, forgiveness and Erin’s Law.*

“...IT SHOULD BE CLEAR THAT, IF ONE MAN’S RIGHTS ARE DENIED, THE RIGHTS OF ALL ARE IN DANGER—THAT IF ONE MAN IS DENIED EQUAL PROTECTION OF THE LAW, WE CANNOT BE SURE THAT WE WILL ENJOY FREEDOM OF SPEECH OR ANY OTHER OF OUR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS.”

ROBERT F. KENNEDY, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, JUNE 21, 1961

SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER

VOICES FROM BEYOND THE DARK

A play by ARIEL DORFMAN

Adapted from **SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER :HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS WHO ARE CHANGING OUR WORLD**, a book by Kerry Kennedy



Scene from a student production of the play at the RFK Community Schools on January 24th, 2013.

ABOUT THIS PLAY

Speak Truth To Power: Voices From Beyond the Dark is a play for ten actors (preferably five male and five female, though can also be cast, if necessary, with four female and six male actors). Eight of these actors, four male, four female, will represent the human rights defenders. The other two (a man and a woman, or two men) represent evangelists of evil, malicious and sarcastic embodiments of fear and repression first and then, as the play advances, of the indifference

which is the perpetual opposite of love. These oppressors should be dressed differently, lit differently, act differently, and speak differently from the human rights defenders. They are supposed to have more mobility, should be allowed to roam the stage at will, whispering, probing, threatening, determined to undermine the message from the heroes and heroines. This differentiation is crucial to the drama of the play.

EXCERPTS FROM THE PLAY

Many of those who have suffered most grievously in South Africa have been ready to forgive—people who you thought might be consumed by bitterness, by a lust for revenge. We had a hearing at the Truth Commission chock-a-block full with people who had lost loved ones, massacred. Four officers came up, one white and three black. The white said: “We gave the orders for the soldiers to open fire”—in this room, where the tension could be cut with a knife, it was so palpable. Then he turned to the audience and said, “Please, forgive us. And please receive these, my colleagues, back into the community.” And that very angry audience broke out into quite deafening applause. I said, “Let’s keep quiet, because we are in the presence of something holy.”

PAUSE

My name is Desmond Tutu.
I did what I had to do. Anything else would have tasted like ashes. It would have been living a lie. I could have been part of the struggle in a less prominent position. But God took me, as they say, by the scruff of the neck, like Jeremiah. I have a God who doesn’t say, “Ah. . . Got you!” No, God says, “Get up.” And God dusts us off and God says, “Try again.” God says, “Try again.”

My name is Kailash Satyarthi.

*MAN MAKES A GESTURE AND THE NAME (OR IMAGE OF)
KAILASH SATYARTHI APPEARS ON THE SCREEN.*

When I was five or six years old, the very first day that I went to my school I found a cobbler and his son, sitting right on the doorstep of my school and they were cleaning and polishing shoes of children and as soon as I was entering, there was a lot of joy and happiness. I was carrying new books and a new bag and new clothes, new uniform, everything new and I saw that child and I stopped for a while because in my knowledge, or in my conscious, it was the

first encounter like that, so one thing came to my mind, that why a child of my age is sitting and polishing shoes for children like me and why am I going to school? So I wanted to ask this question to the child but I did not have enough courage, so I entered in and my teacher welcomed me but I did not ask this question though I still had that feeling in my heart that I should, but a couple of hours later I collected all my courage and I asked my teacher, that sir, I wanted to know why this child of my age is sitting right on the doorstep and cleaning shoes? So he looked at me strangely and said, “What are you asking, you have come to study here not for all these unnecessary things and these questions. It is not your business.” So I was a little angry. I thought that I should go back home and ask these questions to my mother and I asked and she said, “Oh, you have not seen many children are working. It is their destiny. They are poor people. They have to work.” I was told not to worry about it. But one day I went to the father, the cobbler, and I said, “I watch this boy every day. I have a question. Why don’t you send your child to school?” So the father looked at me, for two minutes he could not answer. Then he slowly replied, “I am untouchable and we are born to work.” So I could not understand why some people are born to work and why some people like us are born to go to school. How does it come from? So it made me a little bit rebellious in my mind, because nobody was there to answer. Whom should I ask? My teacher had no answer. Nobody had a good answer. And I carried that in my heart for years. And now, I am doing something about this. Five million children in India alone are born into slavery. Small children of six, seven years, forced to work fourteen hours a day. If they cry for their parents, they are beaten severely, sometimes hanged upside-down on the trees and branded or burned with cigarettes. And the number of children are going up—parallel to the growth of exports. The export of carpets go up and the children in servitude go up and up. So we conduct consumer campaigns. And direct actions: secret raids that free those children and return them to their families. But when you free them, work has just begun.

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