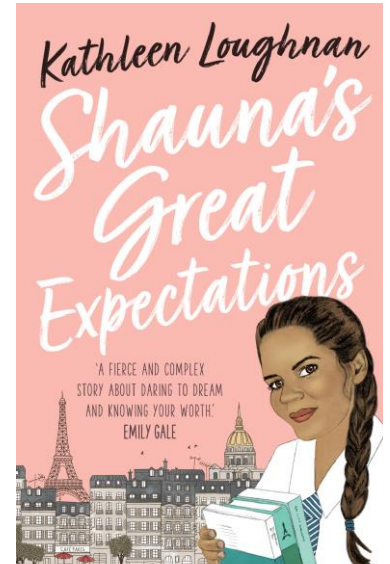


Shauna's Great Expectations

By Kathleen Loughnan



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Paperback novel
Recommended for 14-18-year-olds

Summary

Shauna is in her final year at an elite private school and has great expectations. Along with her best friends, Lou-Anne and Jenny, she's been dreaming and talking about her future for ages. In one short year, she'll be travelling the world and chasing her ideal career.

But Shauna is no ordinary private school girl. She holds an Indigenous scholarship and is determined to be the first member of her family to go to university, no matter what other students think of her. The year seems to be off to an excellent start, but Shauna knows that something's not right.

All her plans are suddenly thrown into disarray when she realises she's pregnant. One big night at a music festival now threatens to destroy ambitions and friendships that she's cherished for years. As pressure builds from every corner of her world, careers, reputations and even lives will hang in the balance.

What will Shauna have to sacrifice to keep hold of her dreams? Can she fulfil her own promise and still keep her promises to others? Will all her expectations be ripped away?

* * *

Shauna's Great Expectations is a wonderfully original coming-of-age novel with an unforgettable protagonist whose warmth, humour and sass gets right into your heart and under your skin. If you loved the character of Josie in *Looking for Alibrandi* you will completely fall for Shauna Harding.

The novel's first-person, present tense narration provides an intimacy and immediacy to the story's personal dramas, as well as the larger themes of social justice, racism, teen pregnancy and politics.

Use in the curriculum

Written in an engaging style, this novel is suitable for use in the English classroom for Year 9 and older. It encourages discussion of many personal, ethical, social and political themes of interest to teenage students.

It also addresses the cross-curriculum requirement of the Australian Curriculum – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures.

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Themes

- boarding school
- education
- teen pregnancy
- discrimination
- justice
- family
- politics
- racism
- friends

Discussion questions

1. In dot points explain why you think the author opened the novel with a scene at a 'Change the Date' rally? Include dot points for the mood this setting establishes, as well as for the sort of traits you expect Shauna to demonstrate as the story progresses.
2. Kathleen Loughnan says, 'Though strides are being made in terms of education and inclusion in professional, political and cultural life, Australian First Peoples are treated worse than any other group in society. Better to be Greek-Australian than Chinese-Australian, better to be Vietnamese-Australian than Syrian-Australian, and anything is better than being Aboriginal. That's the truth from any social or statistical analysis, and while most "ethnic" groups become more accepted and appreciated as time goes by, it's not the case with Aboriginal Australians. It's an urgent and embarrassing situation.' [See below for a more extended comment from the author.]

Discuss this statement in relation to Shauna's interactions with:

- Dr Goldsmith in Chapter 13
 - The police in Chapter 18
 - Mrs Green in Chapters 23 & 24
3. 'I don't know why I, Shauna Harding seventeen-year-old high school student, feel the need to take on the sins of other Aboriginal people, but I do...I intend to have all those advantages, and when the time is right, I intend to stand up.' (pp. 143-144)
'...But not everyone who loves you wants the best for you. Some people want to keep you in your place so that they can stay in theirs.' (p. 162)
'The hand on the door that slams in every Aboriginal person's face at some stage – the hand on the machete that my cousin Andrew says is poised to chop off the heads of high achievers – is sometimes a black hand.' (p. 233)
 - What do you think the author is suggesting about the attitudes of some Aboriginal people in these three quotes? How do these quotes relate to Olivia Pike's attitudes early in the novel, as well as Shauna's aunt Julie and her cousin Andrew?
 4. Class Discussion:
 - Why did Shauna decide to keep her baby?
 - Do you agree with her decision?
 - Does the fact that the author also had a baby at this stage and went on to have a very successful career change your view of abortion?
 - Do you think Shauna would be as likely to have made the same decision if she were white?
 - How might things have worked out for her if she had had the abortion?
 - Does our society judge pregnant teenagers harshly?

5. Do you agree with Germaine Greer's theory, as expressed by Shauna, that the industrialised West has created a society that is anti-children and anti-family? (p. 263) How does this theory relate to Shauna's own experience of pregnancy and family?
6. 'It made me wonder what would be possible if we focused as much on education as we do on the dates, words and symbols that have become popular political footballs.' (p. 305)
 - How has access to a good quality education transformed Shauna? Do you agree that Australia focuses too much on 'political footballs' and not enough on things that could have a tangible impact on Aboriginal people?
7. 'I realise now that being poor embarrassed me. Sadly, being Aboriginal embarrassed me. My brother's death embarrassed me. Even my family embarrassed me. Not anymore...I tell myself, you deserve it.' (p. 308).
 - Write a 250-word essay comparing and contrasting Shauna at the beginning of her HSC year and at the end.
8. Retell the story from the viewpoint of either Olivia Pike or Keli Street Hughes. In your telling describe how your attitudes about Shauna changed over the course of the year.
9. Other than the fact that Shauna is ambitious and wants to travel after school, why do you think the book is called *Shauna's Great Expectations*? [Hints include pregnancy and Charles Dickens.]

From the author

'Like Shauna, I got pregnant when I was still a "baby", but from the moment I saw my daughter's heartbeat on the ultrasound screen, I could not contemplate an abortion – though it was proposed by others several times. I didn't have support from anyone except the child's father, and I was lucky to have that. Most people in my life, and even members of the public, treated me horribly, even though I was married and the perfect age biologically to carry and give birth to a child. I don't understand why giving birth when you're young is frowned upon. It's an awful, outmoded part of Australia that deserves to be criticised.

'I've had several more children since then and done a great deal in terms of my career, sport, travel, romance and service to others. I don't consider that my children have held me back in any way. They have changed my character for the better. They have made me more responsible and loving, not just in the context of our family but in terms of the wider world... At the same time, I think that not being a mother has many great advantages – among them being freer, not having to worry as much, not making as much of an impact on the environment and having more money. If you don't want to be a mother, you shouldn't have to be. No woman should be criticised for not wanting children – they're a huge burden – but once you're pregnant, the character of the decision changes dramatically as it involves the life or death of a human being. Abortions should be rare.

'Though strides are being made in terms of education and inclusion in professional, political and cultural life, Australian First Peoples are treated worse than any other group in society. Better to be Greek-Australian than Chinese-Australian, better to be Vietnamese-Australian than Syrian-Australian, and anything is better than being Aboriginal. That's the truth from any social or statistical analysis, and while most "ethnic" groups become more accepted and appreciated as time goes by, it's not the case with Aboriginal Australians. It's an urgent and embarrassing situation.

'I hope that the book will be read by a wide range of young adults. Mostly, I'm hoping to inspire girls and women to look upon childbearing positively and not feel guilty or ashamed to have a baby if they are already pregnant. It's also my hope to show Aboriginal kids what can be achieved if they step out of their comfort zone, and what they can bring back to their communities if they have the courage to leave them for a while.

'My personal experience is very much behind the book's themes, but the story is still just a story and it's been redrafted and changed many times. But there is a real "Lou-Anne" and she really has made it as an opera singer in Europe.'

— Kathleen Loughnan

About the author

Kathleen is an Australian lawyer and writer. She was born in remote rural Victoria and has lived in the central west of New South Wales and semi-rural Sydney, where she could pursue her interest in horses and agriculture. She attended an agricultural high school, an agricultural college and finally law school. Kathleen practised law for about 10 years, before deciding to write and stay at home with her children full-time.

All the most exciting things that ever happened to Kathleen occurred after she started having children – including becoming a lawyer, travelling the world, learning to speak a foreign language, riding expensive dressage horses, and having books published by major trade publishing houses. She firmly believes that girls and women with children can do whatever they want.



Kathleen now lives between Australia and Europe with her husband and their four children.