

# Always Will Be

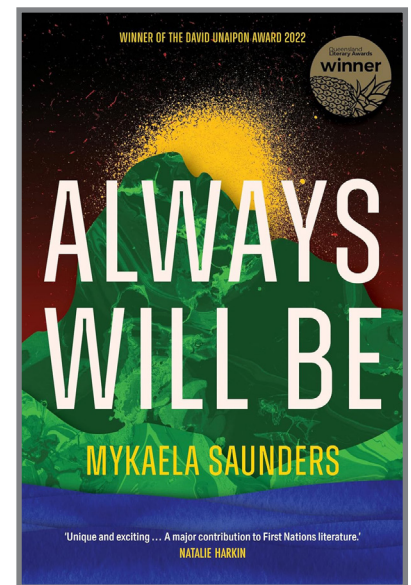
AUTHOR

**MYKAELA SAUNDERS**

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**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Upper Secondary  
(Violence, Sexual References, Drug and Alcohol references)



## SYNOPSIS

In this stunningly inventive and thought-provoking collection, Mykaela Saunders poses the question: what might country, community and culture look like in the Tweed if Gooris reasserted their sovereignty?

Each of the stories in *Always Will Be* is set in its own future version of the Tweed. In one, a group of girls plot their escape from a home they have no memory of entering. In another, two men make a final visit to the country they love as they contemplate a new life in a faraway place. Saunders imagines different scenarios for how the local Goori community might reassert sovereignty—reclaiming country, exerting full self-determination or incorporating non-Indigenous people into the social fabric—while practicing creative, ancestrally approved ways of living with changing climates.

Epic in scope, and with a diverse cast of characters, *Always Will Be* is the ground-breaking winner of the 2022 David Unaipon Award. This is a forward-thinking collection that refuses cynicism and despair, and instead offers entertaining stories that celebrate Goori ways of being, knowing, doing—and becoming.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Mykaela Saunders is a Koori/Goori and Lebanese writer, teacher and researcher, and the editor of *This All Come Back Now*, the Aurealis Award–winning, world-first anthology of blackfella speculative fiction (UQP, 2022). *Always Will Be* won the 2022 David Unaipon Award. Mykaela’s novel manuscript *Last Rites of Spring* was also shortlisted for the Unaipon Award in 2020, and received a Next Chapter Fellowship in 2021. Mykaela has won the ABR Elizabeth Jolley Short Story Prize, the Oodgeroo Noonuccal Indigenous Poetry Prize, the National Indigenous Story Award, the Grace Marion Wilson Emerging Writers Prize for creative non-fiction and the University of Sydney’s Sister Alison Bush Graduate Medal for Indigenous research. Of Dharug descent, Mykaela belongs to the Tweed Goori community through her Bundjalung and South Sea Islander family. Mykaela has worked in Aboriginal education since 2003, and at the tertiary level since 2012. They are currently an Indigenous postdoctoral fellow at Macquarie University, researching First Nations speculative fiction.

## THEMES

- Goori customs and beliefs (with similarities to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples):
  - Community
  - Stories

- Spirituality
- Connection to country
- Racism in Australia
- Impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including the impact of the Stolen Generations
- Identity and belonging; individual experiences of destruction and renewal
- Heritage destruction and renewal
- Climate change and future possibilities for adaptation to climate
- Concepts of 'time' from a First Nations perspective

## STUDY NOTES

### BEFORE READING

- It is difficult to study texts by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors without an understanding of the geographical, sociopolitical and historical contexts in which the texts sit. Depending on students' prior knowledge, teachers could guide students in some initial research about these contexts before reading the text. Suggested authentic and culturally appropriate resources for student research are listed below.
  - For an overview of Bundjalung country and language, there are a number of maps and videos on the Gambay Indigenous Languages web resource <<https://gambay.com.au/languages?language=Bundjalung>>
  - Learning about Tweed Goori cultures and histories would best be done in person, on Country, with local Goori community members. If you are able to travel to the Tweed, there are two cultural centres of note to visit:
    - Minjungbal Museum, Tweed Heads
    - Tweed Regional Museum, Murwillumbah
  - For those who can't physically be in the Tweed the following online information is available:
    - Tweed Aboriginal Cultural Heritage, Tweed Museum <<https://museum.tweed.nsw.gov.au/explore/aboriginal-cultural-heritage>>
    - Tweed land, life, culture, Tweed Museum <<https://museum.tweed.nsw.gov.au/explore/natural-heritage/explore-land-life-culture>>

### AFTER READING

#### Concepts of Time

- The author, Mykaela Saunders, includes a key quote for the epigraph to the book: 'We see our future stretching as far ahead of us as our past does behind us' —Dr Lilla Watson. This prompts the reader to consider concepts of time. Common First Nations concepts of time are that it is circular, not linear, and the past, present and future coexist. Connected to this non-linear vision of time is the concept of 'deep time'. That is, looking far into the earth's history and far into the future, understanding that we are part of a continual loop of past and future generations. Consider these concepts of time in relation to 'Taking Our Time' (pp 11–22). In particular, discuss the double meaning of the title.
- To explore the concept of 'deep time' further, read and discuss the article 'All things will outlast us': how the Indigenous concept of deep time helps us understand environmental destruction (Ann McGrath, 2020, published in The Conversation). <<https://theconversation.com/all-things-will-outlast-us-how-the-indigenous-concept-of-deep-time-helps-us-understand-environmental-destruction-132201>>

#### Speculative Fiction

- The author points out that First Nations spirituality includes belief in the supernatural, time travel, astral projection, and communication between humans, animals and nature. Consider and discuss these descriptions of First Nations speculative fiction in relation to the stories in this collection, in particular:
  - Tweed Sanctuary Tour
  - A Prodigal Return
  - Blood and Soil

Are these totally positive futures? In what ways are they positive and in what ways could they be seen as perpetuating

colonial practices?

- Discuss the idea that while better futures can be imagined, it is difficult to achieve 'utopia'.

### Connection to Country

- All the stories in this collection connect with this theme in some way. Here is a selection to consider:

#### River Story pp 59–77

- The importance of the river is highlighted in many ways throughout this story. As a class, discuss the significance of the river.
- The river is a healer and a life-giver. Discuss its power and significance to Gracey and Juna.
- Discuss the vivid imagery, particularly in Juna's mind as she imagines fishing and preparing the fish: the rooms of her brain, the memories exploding out of her skull (pp 62–64).
- Another point for discussion is the love and community of the birthing scene (pp 69–71) and the funeral ceremony (p 76). Compare this to the beliefs perpetuated by government during the protection era that Aboriginal parents were unfit and their children were neglected, and that they wouldn't mourn their stolen children.

#### No Country for Old Women pp 23–41

- Discuss the pros and cons of living 'off-grid', and how she describes the life her kids are living down in the city.
- Discuss how her connection to Country may have saved her; also that the technology she so shunned helped in connecting her to help.
  - In what other ways might technology be useful to us in a sustainable future? Are sustainability and technology mutually exclusive? Consider technological advances in sustainable farming.
  - Compare 'Terranora', 'Cyclone Season' and 'Cold Coast' as examples of Gooris adapting to climate change. Also 'Kinship Festival' set a few hundred years from now, after another ice age, adapting culture but still retaining the cultural practices we know today and of ancient days before.

### Personal Stories of Renewal, Revival and Survival

- Discuss the difference it makes to a person to have a community around them supporting them to improve themselves, and the importance of maintaining connection to community, family and Country in order to become strong and confident citizens.

### Creative Writing and Language Features

- 'A Prodigal Return' can be paired for study with 'Our Future in the Stars', as both explore the possibility of humans deciding to leave the planet and live in space while the Earth recovers from human destruction. Both stories include good examples of imagery and descriptive language. Ask students to write an original short-story response considering another aspect of this topic of relocating humans into space.
- Read 'The Girls Home' and discuss the experiences the girls have of being domestic servants kept in dormitories like their great-grandmothers and grandmothers had experienced. Compare this story to two poems in the poetry collection *Fire Front* (UQP, 2020), edited by Alison Whittaker and consider the following questions:
  - In what ways does the experience of the Aboriginal domestic servant cut to the heart of the racism and oppression of colonial Australia?
  - How can we best ensure this past is never forgotten? Is the VR simulation the girls were put through in 'The Girls Home' ethical? Is this the best way to ensure the continuation of these stories and this memory? Should the experience be extended to non-Indigenous people?