



# Something Like Hope

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## **Something Like Hope** Shawn Goodman

17-year-old Shavonne has been in juvenile detention since the seventh grade. Mr Delpopolo is the first counselor to treat her as an equal, and he helps her get to the bottom of her self-destructive behavior, her guilt about past actions, and her fears about leaving the Center when she turns 18. Shavonne tells him the truth about her crack-addicted mother, the child she had (and gave up to foster care) at fifteen, and the secret shame she feels about what she did to her younger brother after her mother abandoned them.

Meanwhile, Shavonne's mentally unstable roommate Cinda makes a rash move, and Shavonne's quick thinking saves her life—and gives her the opportunity to get out of the Center if she behaves well. But Shavonne's faith is tested when her new roommate, mentally retarded and pregnant Mary, is targeted by a guard as a means to get revenge on Shavonne. As freedom begins to look more and more likely, Shavonne begins to believe that maybe she, like the goslings recently hatched on the Center's property, could have a future somewhere else—and she begins to feel something like hope.

This is a brutally honest, but hopeful story of finding yourself and moving beyond your past.

## **Something Like Hope Details**

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# From Reader Review Something Like Hope for online ebook

## **Sarah (YA Love) says**

I've read quite a few books recently that teachers and librarians should have in their libraries, but *Something Like Hope* is the first book I've read in a while that, if I had the money, I'd buy for all of my teaching friends to read and include in their libraries. Some of us may not have a student like Shavonne right now (that we know of), but who's to say we won't in the future. Shawn Goodman wrote this poignant novel in response to his experiences working in juvenile detention facilities. Unfortunately, many people across the country have had experiences like Shawn. This is why it's so very important for people to know about *Something Like Hope*. I hope that many readers (teens, parents, educators, etc) will read this novel.

Shavonne's exterior tough attitude reminded me of some of the students I've had. She's suffered from all types of abuse from when she was living with her mom, living in foster care and living in the detention center. It's no wonder that Shavonne has built up this wall to protect herself; she's constantly preparing herself for fight or flight. The abuse she suffers at the juvenile detention facility is the most haunting of all. Any time something happened to her or to another character, I wanted to bust through those doors and have someone arrested! Thankfully Shavonne finds some solace in Mr. Delpopolo. He's straight-forward and honest with her, which both throws Shavonne for a loop, but is also something she desperately needs. Mr. Delpopolo shows Shavonne compassion, which so many teens—troubled or not—crave. The therapy Shavonne receives from talking to Mr. Delpopolo allows her to feel. She feels more than just pain and fear. She starts feeling sympathy and love and concern for her new roommate Mary. She starts feeling trust for those in the center who have helped her. Like the summary says, Shavonne starts feeling hope.

Knowing that Shawn has experiences like Mr. Delpopolo boggles my mind. I've listened to some of my students' heart-wrenching stories, but I haven't heard anything like Shavonne's story. I had a difficult time not crying while I was reading *Something Like Hope*. Shawn deserves high-praises for the work he's doing with troubled teens and for writing such a powerful and tragic, yet hopeful novel. It's my hope that *Something Like Hope* gets the attention it deserves and consequently more troubled teens get the help they so desperately need. This is a five-star debut novel without a doubt!

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## **Mstevens says**

Sad, raw, and frank. Book aside, I like that Shawn Goodman has been an active part of this type of environment.

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## **Margo says**

Trigger warning for rape, self harm, abuse, and violence.

This was a very difficult novel to read because it deals with such hard topics. I don't really like sad or upsetting novels, thus my lower rating. I still think it dealt with problems realistically.

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## Doret says

17 yr old Shavonne has been living in juvenile detention centers since junior high. When the story begins Shavonne is getting in trouble for fighting with one of the guards. She's also meeting her new counselor, Mr Delpoplo for the first time. It takes time but Mr Delpoplo but is the first adult Shavonne as trusted in awhile.

Shavonne is dealing with a lot, including regret and loss. Her mother is addicted to drugs and her fathers in jail and that's why she isn't with her parents. I simply don't remember the author stating why Shavonne was sent to JDC in the first place.

When Shavonne describes the hardships she has or is facing it simply feels like she's going through the motions. When she or one of the other girls cursed, the words didn't fit in their mouths. It felt as if choice words were added because it was expected. A few of the guards abuse their power, Ms. Choi is the worst offender. I found many of these scenes unbelievable.

This came at the end of last year. I knew I wouldn't read it until I could borrow it from the library. I was simply not in a rush to read a YA novel featuring a Black protagonist living through a struggle. It didn't add anything new to what's already out.

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## Andrew Hicks says

*Something Like Hope* accomplished a feat very few books can boast - it made me cry. It was a surprise cry, too, a sneak attack that happened at the very end of a narrative chock full of living human byproducts of abandonment, injustice and bleak despair. It's a sad reality, the one in this book. It'll make you feel grateful for what you have, mournful for what you've been through and protective of your loved ones. All that, and it's less than 200 pages long. Which, to be sure, is always a blessing.

Almost all of this book takes place in a juvenile detention facility. The main character, Shavonne, is 17. Somewhere out in the world, she has a baby daughter, a mom who's a crackhead and a dad who truly doesn't give a shit. Shavonne ended up incarcerated because, honestly, I don't remember, but honestly, it doesn't matter. The circumstances of her neglectful upbringing were going to lead her here no matter what.

The detention center is populated with a somewhat predictable group of inmates. There's a couple good-hearted but crazy girls, and a couple of barely literate troublemakers. Every girl depicted here seems like she could be a real person, yes, but this is the one element of the book that made me self-conscious that *Something Like Hope* was written by a middle-aged white guy. Luckily, Shavonne herself, who narrates the book - seems absolutely genuine the whole way through.

The growups on the staff also seem bonafide, and that's hardly a surprise. Author Shawn Goodman has worked as a psychologist in juvenile corrections in real life. Naturally, I wondered if the main adult character, Mr. Delpopo, is based on Goodman - quiet, methodical, observant, there to help, a broken man himself.

Either way, Delpopo is a great character, and so is Cyrus, a kind of Groundskeeper Willie/bus driver/orderly

combo. Cyrus points out to the girls and introduces to the story a pair of Canadian geese who live on the detention center pond, trying to keep their incubating eggs safe from predators.

There's a woman villain, Mrs. Choi, who's in charge of all the guards. Selfish, disgusting and motivated by power and fear, Choi causes most of the problems in the book that weren't already simply caused by society and the system. She still somehow defies being cartoonish.

I read the last two-thirds of *Something Like Hope* in a single sitting. I stayed up past my bedtime to finish it, which is something I rarely do. This book was Goodman's debut - he's two novels deep in his YA career, and I read and enjoyed his sophomore effort, *Kindness For Weakness*, about six months ago. I'd recommend either book, but this would be the one to start with.

Goodman joins John Corey Whaley and Ruta Sepetys as a YA author who has so far published two books, both of which I've read and enjoyed.

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### **Imani ♥ ? says**

I know I shouldn't judge a book by its cover (which is basically what I'm doing) but I just couldn't bring myself to read this. I think I'm being biased. But after reading the inside cover jacket, I resolved that I wasn't going to read it.

You see, I'm not really into pity books. I can read them SOMETIMES but only if the character is actually worth reading about. That's just not what I do. And I also hate inspirational movies and stuff. You know, like the Blind Side (yuck). Or some other crap where the characters learn about hope or leadership or something like that. No way. So, while I was reading the inside cover jacket, I realized that this was definitely fitting into the "help-me-im-black-and-in-jail-and-im-in-trouble-so-please-white-person-help-me" category.

No.

Just...no.

I understand that the author set out to write a nice book. But I just don't like books that set off to establish stereotypes and then have some person (most times a white person) help them out. I'm not trying to sound racist but I just don't find any appeal in that. Which is why I couldn't even read this book. Don't worry. I paged through it. And nothing that I saw changed my mind.

Maybe I'm being mean. Sorry. I don't mean to be. I just...didn't like this book. I'm not gonna rate it, though. Maybe I'll read it some other time (like when hell freezes over).

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### **Kira Nerys says**

I loved this book when I started it, and then I began having this niggling feeling that it reminded me of something. Eventually, I realized the setting felt similar to *Cut*, which I read at exactly the right age to be strongly affected by it--early high school, maybe? I'm almost positive that if I'd read this book then, too, I'd be giving it four stars. Because Shavonne's story brings up big issues and talks about elements of our society

we don't like to confront. The book has the potential to educate people who have never interacted with the system of juvenile detention. It discusses abuse, mental illness, systemic oppression--the girls in the detention center have been through some of life's worst experiences. Goodman brings his professional experience of working with girls like Shavonne, Cinda, and Mary to his writing, so their stories, voices, and personalities feel very real. Of course, I'm white, and Goodman is as well, so perhaps I'm not the best judge of that subject. But Shavonne struck me as a strong, well-rounded character.

Unfortunately, I don't think the writing quite holds up. The pacing stuck out most, with the stylistically brief snapshots preventing a strong story arc from forming. In vignettes about the imprisoned girls I found the most impactful moments. The timeline felt like it sped up as I continued reading; by the end, it seemed rushed. Goodman walks a difficult line in balancing the value of a good therapist and trying to avoid a white savoir trope. I'm not entirely certain he succeeds, although the text does a better job than the book's back-cover summary. Personally, I thought too few therapy sessions were shown, making Shavonne's shifting perspective seem unprompted. I'm sure other readers would see it the other way.

Goodman's writing also felt like it lacked something. I don't know what, beyond feeling that his subject matter (evocative, memorable) made up for something missing in the style. Perhaps a different editor could have solved that problem. Regardless, this instinctual reaction to the writing is both the reason for my 3-star rating and the reason I'm focusing on the content. As a white reader, and as someone with privilege, this book revealed troubles of the juvenile detention system that I wasn't aware of. I valued being forced to confront the painful elements of society I prefer to ignore. I doubt I'd recommend this book over one written by a black author (Sharon G. Flake and Jacqueline Woodson are particular favorites for high school readers), but it's certainly a worthwhile addition to every library.

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### **Dena says**

It was a really good book. Depressing, but really good. The beginning and middle of the book were good but the ending was too sudden. It took a long time for the story to set up and there was too little time for the ending. I sort of wanted to process more of what happened before the ending.

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### **Lucia says**

Shawn Goodman does a fantastic, if not frightening job of telling the story of Shavonne, a teenager in a female juvenile detention center. He does not hide anything about how scary it can be, especially with the guards and fellow in-mates. The authors work as a psychologist in several New York juvenile detention facilities has been brought forth in this work of realistic fiction.

Shavonne is a tough girl who has lived a life that no child should ever have to experience. Her childhood in foster care has given her so much hate and anger that it is hard for her to see anything else in her life. She fights the only people that show her kindness until her counselor, who seems to be even more downtrodden than her, steps in and just lets her be. His counseling methods bring her to a place where she realizes she is just tired of fighting.

Read this book and understand that even the toughest lives can come up out of the mire and shoot for the good light.

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## Stacy says

Dr. Delpopolo finally breaks Shavonne, -mentally and emotionally. She finally realizes that she can't choose what happens to her, but to just accept it.

Out of 5, I rate this book at 4.5 and would recommended it to younger victims of abuse because the book is really all about that. Or to someone who is doing research about the behavior of abused victims.

Text-to-Self: The connection I've had is that just like Shavonne, I also try to plan things out a certain way. I say I have it under control, when really I have no idea about what might happen.

Text-to-Text: This book reminds me of something we've read in class. Little paragraphs that have a specific idea and want to get to a point. The chapters are short, like a page or two. I think the purpose of that is to make it like a dairy or journal, without calling it that.

Text-to-World: The book gives you a feel about how misunderstood abused victims are. They have a anger in them and people assume they are just angry at the world. They have no voice.

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## Matt Blackstone says

SOMETHING LIKE HOPE isn't an ordinary book and it isn't about ordinary people. The protagonist, Shavonne, isn't ordinary (a 17 year old mother in juvenile prison), neither is her newest shrink (crass, comedic, lonely) and neither is his name (Mr. Delpopolo). Her guard is neither ordinary nor fair (Ms. Choi taunts Shavonne so she'll snap and Ms. Choi has reason to beat her). Her baby doesn't belong to her, her face is battered and bloody, and her deranged roommate is now obsessed with geese. Shavonne's future may be bleak, but she--like this book--is extraordinary.

Shawn Goodman's novel starts with Shavonne, trapped in her cell, after stealing her teacher's sandwich and then elbowing her in the face. Shavonne is already in deep trouble, has been for awhile, when she's forced to explain her most recent crime. Enter Mr. Delpopolo, a man with plenty of his own problems.

What follows is unflinching look at the flaws in a juvenile justice system that grants far too much power to guards and not enough support to its inmates. Shavonne may be not perfect--often times, admittedly, she's violent, selfish, and uncaring--but she's real and raw and forgiving and unforgettable.

As a high school teacher with more than a few former students locked up at some point in their teenage years, I found this to be a truly fascinating read. I can't wait to share it with my students next year.

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## Michelle Kessler says

For multiple reasons, I did not want to like Shawn Goodman's Something Like Hope. Firstly, the cover is saccharinely ridiculous, with its open-mouthed girl, staring into oblivion, and failed-perspective geese. I also mistakenly thought it was a historical novel about the Civil Rights Movement, of which I have read too many within the last few years. They were mostly good, but I'm a little tired of them. Secondly, and more importantly, this is a book about a teenager in a juvenile detention group home, written by a school psychologist who has worked in such homes. Generally, these types of books are not well-written, but simply special pleading for the group involved.

Luckily, *Something Like Hope* is pretty decent. It's simply written with a narrator who is likable despite her violent tendencies. Shavonne has been in the home since she was fifteen, gave birth during the time, and is now nearing her eighteenth birthday and the possibility of freedom. She is mainly trying to ignore the mistreatment from the guards and problems of the other residents. With the help of a new psychologist and her own strength, she attempts to work through the tragedies in her past.

Some problems I had with *Something Like Hope* are the psychologist as hero (though Goodman didn't focus on him too much), the simplified therapeutic breakthrough, and the pat ending. I do feel that he really captured Shavonne's character and made her seem real, instead of a caricature. The emotion of Shavonne's biggest struggle, that concerning her young daughter, actually made me cry. The struggles of the other girls were handled in a balanced manner, showing how, while there were underlying causes to their antisocial behaviors, those behaviors were still harmful to Shavonne and themselves. The language was realistic and graphic, but based on my teaching experience, not gratuitous. A high school or mature middle school student would enjoy reading about Shavonne's journey into maturity.

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### **SwensonBooks says**

Young adult fiction is not a genre I generally seek out, given my lack of interest in vampires or teen romance. *Something like Hope* (Delacorte Press/Random House) is not what I expected of teen fiction. It's a haunting story of Shavonne, who has been in "juvie" all her teenage years. Based on Shawn Goodman's own experiences working within New York State juvenile detention facilities, it's a coming of age story that breaks your heart open to the possibility of hope for someone who has had the cards stacked against her. The antics of abusive guards and careless counselors give the reader an unflinchingly honest and realistic look inside these institutions which beg for juvenile justice reform.

It's the voice of Shavonne which resonates. Angry and confused by what has happened to her, Shavonne lashes out in violence against those who come close to her secrets. As her 18th birthday approaches with imminent release into a harsh world, she begins to open up to a sad-eyed middle-aged white male counselor. He lets her come to terms with giving birth to a baby delivered straight into the system and her own crack-head mother who deserted her. He lets her see it isn't her fault; but what comes next for her will be of her own choosing. He lets her discover these things herself.

The connections between her low self-esteem and self-destructive path lead her to the weight of guilt from the secret she keeps. The guilt she has carried for the role she played in her brother's childhood accident builds like emotional thunderclouds. Letting go of the blame and shame for not being a mother to her brother, or a mother to her own infant, is only possible when she begins to recognize she has been a motherless child. Only now is she becoming an adult and will be responsible for her own self from now on and Shavonne discovers something like hope.

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### **Jenni Frencham says**

Shavonne is in juvenile detention and is rapidly approaching her eighteenth birthday. She is hoping to be released on her birthday and to take custody of her three-year old daughter. She wants to get on with her life and put the past behind her. But she has a lot of work to do before she can get there, and the other girls at the detention center aren't making things easy for her. It's difficult for Shavonne to feel any hope when she is surrounded by so much despair.



This was an interesting look into the juvenile detention system, as well as the mind of a teen who has been incarcerated. I didn't enjoy this book the same way I enjoy other books, but it was an interesting read. Unfortunately, the language choices of the characters are less than stellar, so I can't really recommend this book for classroom use or for anyone's personal library. I was impressed with Shavonne and her decision to let her daughter be adopted by her foster parent, as Shavonne realized that she would not be able to give her daughter the life she wanted her to have, and she really wanted to stop the cycle of abuse. This book was rather depressing, unfortunately.

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## **Choralie says**

17 year old Shavonne is no ordinary teenager. She was born to a crack addicted mother and a father who wasn't really around because he was in prison. "He was in jail when I was born. Drugs, I think. Other stuff too...." p142. She's been in and out of foster care since the age of 6, when her mom abandoned her and her little brother to go get high. It's the last time she ever saw her. Now, Shavonne is in a juvenile detention center, among a bunch of other girls her age who are either pregnant or mentally retarded, and have been through pretty much the same things as Shavonne. "Lots of girls in here are slow...Usually their crimes are prostitution or running drugs for some guy" p85. She was almost sixteen when she delivered her baby girl Jasmine, right into the foster care. She got to nurse her for only a few days. Department of Social Services took her away and put her under the guardianship of a lady name Connie, who practically raises Jasmine while Shavonne is in jail. Connie calls her ever week to tell her how Jasmine is doing and update her on her accomplishments. "Jasmine sang her first song yesterday... Jasmine learned how to ride a tricycle" p48. Eventually Shavonne starts to get better when she is assigned to a new psychologist, Mr. Delpopolo, who treats her as an equal. "The new shrink, a fat white guy, comes in to see me. He's wearing baggy mismatched clothes and glasses with thick tinted lenses that make it hard to see his eyes" p5. Mr. Delpopolo helps her get to the bottom of her self-destructive behavior, the shame about her past, and the fear of leaving the center when she turns 18. Many of the girls in the center have been abused in foster care. Shavonne was one of the unlucky ones. "Come on girl, you go in there with Uncle Leon ...he'll give us fifty dollars Shavonne. I need that money for my medicine...I'll buy you some damn toys. Whatever you want" p75-76. She was just 11 years old when it happened. No one was there to care for her, to protect her or save her from all of the horrible things she had to go through. She use to close her eyes and imagine her dad coming in to rescue her and beating the crap out of those foster uncles, brothers, and dads, but those were only wishful thinking. Her father died in prison before he even got paroled. "For the foster fathers and foster brothers and foster uncles, it's like they've just won the lottery and got their own very own thirteen year old sex toy. It happens two or three times and then you see the writing on the walls... you run away. Then you get picked up for hooking ... because if you're fourteen and homeless, there are only two ways to get by: sell your ass or sell drugs" P47. It is when Mr. Delpopolo gave her an assignment to write a list of things she feels guilty about or ashamed of that he realizes that Shavonne's problems are way deeper than her record shows. During this period of time, she fantasizes about what having a real mother feels like, even though she hates her and they haven't spoken since she last called to tell Shavonne that she was in rehab. After going back and forth about her guilt list she works up the courage to bring it to her session with Mr. Delpopolo. He tells her to cross out all the things on the list that other people did to her. "Is being raped listed on your paper? Yes! ...well you can start by crossing that out...but I am ashamed, and the shame burns its way through me" p 79. Shavonne thinks that the paper says she's garbage, she thinks that she deserved all these things that happened to her because she was bad. "My foster mother burned me with cigarettes and made me sit naked in a cold tub of water when I was bad. Did anybody act sexually toward you while you were there? My foster mother's boyfriend and one of his friends" p80. Mr. Delpopolo explains to her that none of what happened was her fault. The Adults in her life failed to protect her which was their job, they failed to keep her safe, and they let

bad things happen to her. They have always told her that it was her fault that bad things happened to her because she ran away and wore makeup and tight jeans. The session makes her think of things that she never let herself think about before. The thing she feels more shameful and guilty for yet hasn't come out. It isn't until a head to head argument with Mr. Delapolo that she spills out the most shameful thing she thinks she has done. "All I remember is it's cold...so mommy sets up a hot plate in the middle of the living room floor with a big pot of water...she asks me to hold my baby brother, who is wrapped up in blankets then she goes out to do a trick and buy drugs...she practically throws the baby at me and runs out the apartment...it's the last time I ever see her...I dropped the baby...I was supposed to watch him, but he started crying and squirming out of my arms and I accidentally dropped him. He fell and knocked over the pot so all that boiling water dumped on him. I didn't mean to drop him but that doesn't matter...all that matters is because of me my baby brother got his skin scalded off his legs... He went to the hospital and I got sent to foster care" p161-169. The secret is out she is freed, but she doesn't believe it. It makes her angrier than ever to think about something that happened 12 years ago that she can't forgive herself for.. As freedom begins to look more and more likely, Shavonne begins to believe that maybe she, like the goslings recently hatched on the Center's property, could have a future somewhere else, and she begins to feel something like hope. She signs her rights to Jasmine away to Connie who accepts to raise her as her own daughter. Her brother Marcus writes her a letter requesting to see her when she gets out. On her 18th birthday, the day she gets to leave the center, Shavonne gets the letter with a picture inside of her baby brother Marcus who is now 13 years old. The people that have helped her all those years she's been incarcerated come to say happy birthday and their good bye. She takes the greyhound bus headed to a shelter/independent living program in the city where she will start a new life. "There are people everywhere...then, through all the anonymous faces, there is one that I know. A boy, thirteen years old...walking over to me...smiling but frightened...frightened that maybe I will not recognize him...Frightened that I will not accept him..Shavonne...Marcus? We stand there smiling at each other then Marcus throws his arms around me awkwardly...he squeezes me half to death... I can tell he's crying and I am crying too" p192. She tells him everything is going to be okay because she's got a plan. She doesn't know where they are going but she trusts that they're going to be okay.

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