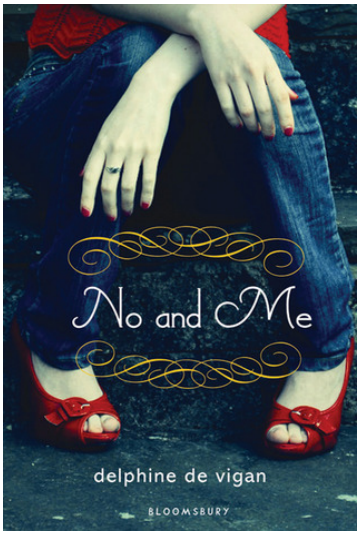

No and Me
Written by Delphine de Vigan
Bloomsbury USA, 2010, pp. 256
ISBN: 978-1599904795

Sometimes I leave her there, in front of an empty beer glass. I get up, sit down again, hang around, try to find something to comfort her. I can't find the words. I don't manage to go. She looks down and says nothing. And our silence is filled with the world's impotence. (p. 51)

Thirteen-year-old Lou is bright. Bright, but shy, however, and that shyness creates opportunities for her Parisian classmates to delight in any attention given her. So, when challenged to make a presentation at school, Lou decides to say the first thing that comes into her head, which is to present the story of a homeless girl based on interviews of an actual homeless teen. The problem is that Lou does not know any homeless people, much less a homeless girl, and she is warned about approaching someone "unsuitable" that she might see on the street. Nevertheless, Lou decides to search for a homeless girl at the Austerlitz train station, and when she is approached by an older girl who wants a cigarette, she sees her opportunity. From this auspicious beginning, the two embark upon a journey of discovery that leads to friendship and the challenges of surviving in a world without support. *No and Me* ventures into the issues of homeless teens, their survival, and the resources they need to become the people they would like to become. The road is difficult—for those who are homeless and for those who may wish to befriend them. Lou and No are realistic characters, which makes reading this novel both difficult and engaging. It is an excellent text to use with young adults as the narrative really puts a face on the homeless population—a face very similar to the readers' own.

No and Me presents one of the most difficult realities faced by developed nations—what do we do with those who are abandoned or who have no resources to keep them from living on the streets? It is a question about national morality and ethics as well as the morality of the communities and individuals within a nation. This novel could be read alongside *Make Lemonade* (Virginia Euwer Wolff, 2006) and *How I Made it to 18* (Tracy White, 2010) in a unit on young adults attempting to survive with limited resources. If added to a unit on homelessness, texts like *A Small Kiss Free Kiss in the Dark* (Glenda Millard, 2011) and *Homelessness Comes to School* (Joseph Murphy KerriTobin, 2011) would be nice complements.

No and Me addresses themes about the weight of being alone in the world, the crucial element of family and friends, and the importance of economic and emotional support. It is a stark reminder that life really is fragile and reminds us that our assumptions about life in developed nations are more myth than reality. The novel is bittersweet, bringing readers to reality that sometimes our help isn't enough. The story widens readers' understandings of homelessness as well as the hope that there are ways to support those who need it. Delphine de Vigan won the 2008 Prix de Libraries award for *No and Me*, her third novel. She lives in Paris and is interviewed in French on

youtube.com at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v TXsiy5xNa74. The book was made into a movie in 2010.

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