

# Nothing

## John Cooper Clarke

"I love talking about nothing. It is the only thing I know anything about"  
(*Oscar Wilde*)

**no'thing** (nŭ'-) n., a., & adv **1.** n. No thing **2.** Not anything **3.** (Arith.) No amount, nought. **4.** Non-existence, what does not exist. **5.** Trifling thing, event, remark, or person

(Concise Oxford Dictionary)

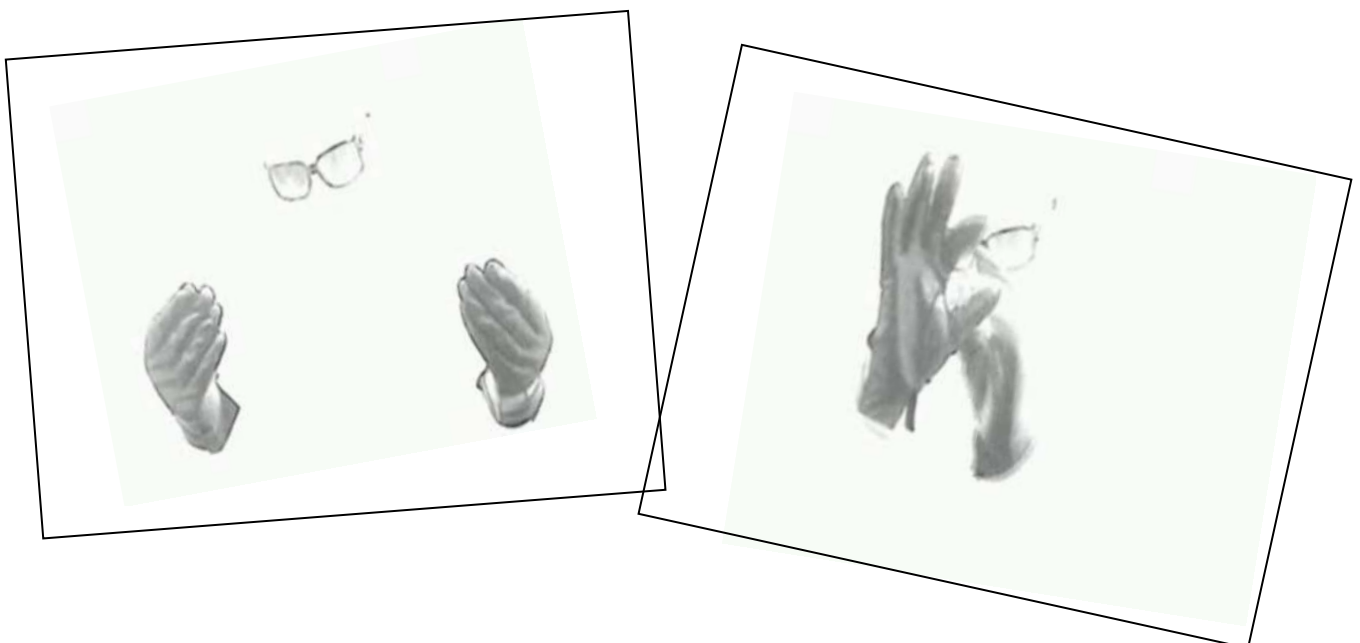
### Before the film

#### 1. Describing 'nothing'

- How would you describe the concept of 'nothing' without using the word 'nothing', 'not anything' or similar?
  - What does 'nothing' feel like?
  - What does it taste like?
  - What does it smell like?
  - What does it look like?
  - What does 'nothing' sound like?
- Can you draw or paint 'nothing' without drawing or painting something?
- Is 'nothing' active or passive? (Does it exist, or is it the lack of something?)

#### 2. Animating 'Nothing'

Here are two stills from the film based on John Cooper Clarke's poem 'Nothing'. In what way(s) do the images represent 'nothing'? What do you think the hands are doing?



## After the film

**1.** In the poem, you heard the poet saying:

I've got that certain nothing  
no one can do without  
the Spanish call it nada  
I call it nowt

Words which mean 'nothing' appear three times: 'nothing', 'nada' and 'nowt' with 'nothing' being the 'standard' word, of course, 'nada' the Spanish (and Portuguese) equivalent, and 'nowt' being a dialect word from northern England (especially Lancashire and Yorkshire).

- Substitute 'the Spanish call it nada' with reference to another language (your own, perhaps). Does this section of the poem still sound right? Does it have the same number of syllables?
- 'I call it nowt'. Do you have another expression for 'nowt'? Perhaps another dialect word, or an informal or slang word to substitute? Try it out with your altered third line.

**2.** Now listen to the poem and watch the animation again. Answer these questions:

- What does 'nothing' taste like?
- Where is the poet not travelling to?
- Who does the poet advise you say nothing to?
- What do you think 'happens once'?
- Explain the words 'bugger all'.

### Language Box

*There are a number of ways to express the concept of a numerical 'nothing' in English. Try to match the word on the left with the situations on the right.*

Zero	A grid game where the other component is a cross
Nought	Football match
Nil	Giving a telephone number
Nix	Looking in the fridge for the milk
Oh	Player (e.g. cricket) scores nothing
Love	Slang use
None	Tennis match
Duck	The thermometer showed this.

### 3. Buy Nothing Day

Here is an advert to join a campaign. Read the text and decide if you would join the organisers in arranging a Buy Nothing Day in your area. If so, how would you advertise your campaign? If not, why not?

Suddenly, we ran out of money and, to avoid collapse, we quickly pumped liquidity back into the system. But behind our financial crisis a much more ominous crisis looms: we are running out of nature... fish, forests, fresh water, minerals, soil. What are we going to do when supplies of these vital resources run low?

There's only one way to avoid the collapse of this human experiment of ours on Planet Earth: we have to consume less.

It will take a massive mindshift. You can start the ball rolling by buying nothing on November 28th. Then celebrate Christmas differently this year, and make a New Year's resolution to change your lifestyle.

It's now or never!

#### Take the Plunge!

As the planet starts heating up, maybe it's time to finally go cold turkey. Take the personal challenge by locking up your debit card, your credit cards, your money clip, and see what it feels like to opt out of consumer culture completely, even if only for 24 hours. Like the millions of people who have done this fast before you, you may be rewarded with a life-changing epiphany. While you're at it, what better time to point out real alternatives to unbridled consumption – and the climate uncertainty that it entails – by taking your BND spirit to the streets?

#### Buy Nothing Day around the world

