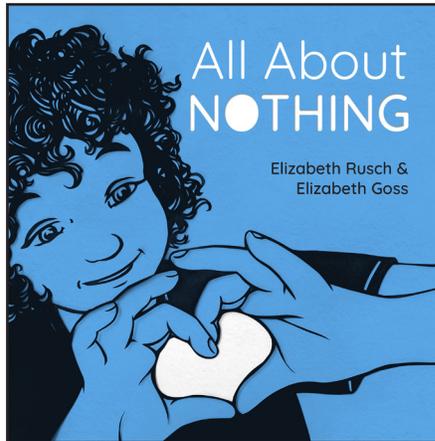


All About NOTHING ACTIVITY KIT

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Elizabeth Rusch
Illustrated by Elizabeth Goss
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About the Book

Nothing is really something! What might be hidden in the space around things, and how is that space important? In art this is known as negative space, but “nothing” can be thought of more broadly—as free time during the day or the space between people. An artful picture-book exploration of negative space and the beauty of nothingness, this mindful meditation encourages children to see the world differently.



About the Author

Elizabeth Rusch is the author of more than two dozen award-winning children’s books, including *A Day with No Crayons*, *The Music of Life*, *Zee Grows a Tree*, *Volcano Rising*, and *Mario and the Hole in the Sky*, winner of the AAAS/Subaru Prize for Excellence in Science Books, the Green Earth Book Award, the Cook Prize, and the Golden Kite Award.

www.elizabethrusch.com



About the Illustrator

Elizabeth Goss is an illustrator, author, and papercutter. Her picture book *My Way West: Real Kids Traveling the Oregon and California Trails* won the Paterson Prize for Books for Young People. A proud member of the Guild of American Papercutters, Elizabeth teaches art workshops across the Pacific Northwest and loves welcoming students of all ages into the world of papercutting. www.lizabethgoss.com

All About NOTHING

Activity Kit

Discussion Guide

Use these questions to kick off classroom discussion, guide pre-thinking and post-reading responses, or inspire a writing or drawing assignment!

1. What is nothing? Where do you see it? How do you know that it's nothing? What are some other words that also mean *nothing*? What are words that mean the opposite of *nothing*?
2. Discuss the cover of *All About Nothing*. What gesture is the character making? What does it mean? How is this gesture an example of the importance of negative space?
3. *All About Nothing* explains that silence is an important part of music. What do you think music would be like if all the sounds happened at once, with no space between them? Can you think of songs that use a lot of negative space or silence?
4. How is empty space important to reading? Why do you think that books meant for beginning readers are designed with more space between the words and sentences? (Use a projector or pass examples around the room to show students how letter size, line spacing, and word spacing are different in a board book, a picture book, an easy reader, a chapter book, a middle-grade novel, a young adult novel, and an adult novel.)
5. *All About Nothing* is illustrated in a medium known as papercutting. What do you know about this art style? Have you seen other art that looks like this? Why do you think this book was illustrated in this particular medium?
6. Nothing can be ". . . a welcome break in a busy day." Why is taking breaks important? How do you know when you need to take a break? What are some things you do on breaks to let go of stress?
7. Sometimes free time seems to go by particularly fast or slow. Why do you think this is? What are some situations in which time seems to fly by? What are some situations in which free time seems to take forever?
8. Do you have a favorite illustration in this book? Why? What feeling(s) does this illustration convey?
9. This book begins with a question. Why do you think the author chose to begin the book this way? At the end of the book, do you feel like your answer to that question is different than it was before reading?

All About NOTHING

Activity Kit

Art Connection: Papercutting

Introduce young artists to the medium of papercutting and concepts of reflection and rotational symmetry with a fun seasonal activity!

Materials

You will need:

- 2–3 sheets of square craft paper per student
- 1 pair of scissors per student
- 1 pencil per student

Procedure

For younger students, skip to step 3. For older students, use steps 1 and 2 to make deeper connections and develop an understanding of design elements in cut-paper art.

- 1. Connect to the text and show art samples.** *All About Nothing* is illustrated using cut-paper images. Examine a few sample spreads from the book and ask: Are you familiar with this style? Do you know other artists who work in this medium? Why is this book illustrated in this style? What does papercutting have to do with nothingness? (Optionally, show the class more cut-paper illustrations from artists such as Nikki McClure, Kiri Ken, Patrick Cabral, etc. and discuss other cut-paper art styles from around the world such as jianzhi, papel picado, and wycinanki. The Guild of American Papercutters is a useful starting point for resources and information.)
- 2. Discuss the main concept.** What is the role of negative space (the empty space around and between the subjects of an image) in cut-paper art? How do papercutters think about negative space when they plan and make their art? How and when do different kinds of symmetry (such as reflection symmetry, where one half is a reflection of the other half, or rotational symmetry, in which a shape looks the same after partial rotation) play a role in papercutting? Look at some examples together of symmetrical and asymmetrical cut-paper art.
- 3. Conduct the project.** Turn to pages 25–28 (“The most amazing things . . . really something!”) of *All About Nothing* and discuss with the class: What do you see in these images? Distribute materials. Ask students try their hand at making cut-paper art by making a snowflake (in the fall and winter) or a flower (in the spring and summer). Have students fold their paper into a triangle. Fold the triangle in half again and then fold it into thirds to create a wedge. Students will cut shapes into the wedge, but before they do, encourage them to think about what they would like their final piece to look like—bold and geometric, delicate and lacy, organically curved—and sketch ideas on their folded paper. After they cut shapes out, unfold the paper to reveal the final design. Allow students twenty to thirty minutes of free work time. Because the cut-out shapes will be repeated, there will be symmetry baked into their finished art.
- 5. Post-project.** Discuss: What did you learn while working on your piece? Did anything surprise you? What would you do differently next time? What was your favorite part? Celebrate the results of students’ hard work by displaying them, or let them bring the pieces home.
- 6. Optional extension.** Follow the snowflake activity with this notan activity from the Mystic Museum of Art: <https://www.mysticmuseumofart.org/2020/05/notan/>. Invite students to reflect in their journals on the similarities and differences between the notan activity and the snowflake activity.

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Art Connection: Fill Me In

Name: _____

Date: _____

Use the spaces below to draw four things you can see by shading in the area around them. If you get stuck, try sketching the outline and shading in the space around it.

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Activity Kit

SEL Connection: Boundaries

Introduce the foundational social concept of boundaries with this collaborative visual activity.

Materials

You will need:

- A whiteboard or large piece of poster paper
- Markers
- Optional: a blank sheet of paper and a writing utensil for each student

Procedure

1. **Connect to the text and supporting ideas.** Read pages 19–24 (“You can have too little . . . Or just the right amount.”) of *All About Nothing* aloud with your class and discuss: What do you see on these pages? What do you hear in the text? What feelings and ideas are represented here? How do you feel when others don’t give you enough space? How do you feel when you have too much space?
2. **Introduce the main concept.** What is a boundary? Consider examples of boundaries: a physical fence between your yard and your neighbor’s yard, a rule about appropriate language at school, or a friend’s preference to fistbump rather than hug. Why are boundaries important? (Hint: Boundaries help people feel safe and respected. Honoring someone’s boundaries will show them that you are a person they can trust. Boundaries are a way to communicate how much space you need to be your best self.)
3. **Set up the visual exercise.** On the whiteboard or poster paper, draw a large circle.
4. **Visual exercise part one.** Ask students for examples of what you can set boundaries around: places, bodies, words, time, personal belongings, activities, etc. Write down their suggestions inside the circle.
5. **Visual exercise part two.** Ask students for examples of ways to set boundaries: by saying “no,” by saying “let’s do something else instead,” by walking away, etc. Write down student suggestions around the outside of the circle. (NOTE: Students may suggest physical ways to set boundaries, such as shoving or punching; discuss this activity ahead of time with your organization so that you have a plan for addressing these suggestions in an age-appropriate way—such as writing them down in a different color, or reminding students to always try nonviolent strategies first, or urging students to only use violent strategies in a self-defense emergency.) Hang the finished poster in a shared space to remind students of good boundary-setting strategies.
6. **Optional personal extension.** Invite older students to draw a circle on their blank sheet of paper and work through the boundary brainstorming exercise for themselves, in class, or as a homework assignment.

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Activity Kit

Writing Connection: Spacing

Name: _____

Date: _____

Use the lines below to write the same sentence three times: once with proper spacing, once with no spacing, and once with spacing in the wrong places.

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Activity Kit

Music Connection: Rhythms

Explore the role of silence in rhythm-making in duple and triple meter with this practice activity.

Materials

This lesson can be applied without any specific materials, though if you wish, you may use it in a setting where each child has a hand drum, set of claves, or similar percussion instrument.

Procedure

- 1. Connect to the text and supporting ideas.** Read page 17 (“Nothing even makes music. . .”) of *All About Nothing* aloud with your class and discuss: What does the author mean when she says that silence is an essential part of music? What do you think music would be like without space between sounds?
- 2. Introduce the main concept.** What is a rhythm? Can you think of example rhythms from your lives, such as a heartbeat, shave-and-a-haircut, or the rhythm of waves coming ashore?
- 3. Establish a counterexample.** Invite your students, using their hands and not their voices, to safely make as much constant noise as possible for a couple of minutes to see what music might be like without silence. They might clap; drum on the floor, desk, chair, or their own laps; or use their percussion instrument. (Unless using a percussion instrument like claves, ask students not to hit one object against another object for safety reasons.) Establish a “stop” signal such as the cutoff gesture used by orchestra conductors before signaling the start of the noise.
- 4. Discuss.** Did you succeed at making sound without silence? Do you think that was music? Why or why not?
- 5. Duple meter.** In Western music, there are two kinds of meter: duple (beats grouped in two, such as 4/4 time) and triple (beats grouped in three, such as 3/4 time). Using your own percussion instrument, or by clapping or drumming on the ground, establish a steady beat and invite students to drum or clap along. As a class, chant aloud “One, two, three, four,” on time with the beat. Discuss: Do you notice the difference between all drumming together on the same beat and making asynchronous noise? Practice recognizing duple meter together by putting on a couple of popular songs in 4/4 time and drumming or clapping along to the beat.
- 6. Optional extension: Duple meter, part two.** The silence between each beat of a measure is important—and so are the silences in more complicated 4/4 rhythms. As a class, resume the chant of “One, two, three, four,” clapping only on beats one, three, and four. As students settle into the rhythm, stop the verbal chant and simply clap in a half-note, quarter-note, quarter-note rhythm. Observe aloud that silence is even more important now! Silence allows musicians to do interesting things with rhythm.
- 7. Optional extension: Triple meter.** Repeat step 5, using 3/4 time. Chant “One, two, three,” in synchrony with a steady beat and practice finding the beat in a few popular songs that are 3/4 time to demonstrate that the same principles of sound and silence apply in triple meter.
- 8. Optional extension: Triple meter, part two.** Repeat step 6, using 3/4 time. Chant “One, two, three,” clapping only on beats one and three. Then slowly fade out the verbal chant so that students can hear the half-note, quarter-note rhythm.

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Activity Kit

Math Connection: Zero

Name: _____

Date: _____

Draw a bush with
some roses

Draw a bush with
zero roses

Draw a pond with
zero fish

Draw a pond with
some fish

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Activity Kit

Paired Reading

Use the following discussion questions and exercises to pair *All About Nothing* with *Ten Beautiful Things* by Molly Beth Griffin for an enhanced learning experience.

Reading & Discussion

Begin by introducing both books. Ask students to observe the titles and covers closely. What do you see? What do you think each book is going to be about? Why do you think you're being shown both books together?

After reading the first book, allow students some quiet time to write in their journals. For students who would like a prompt, ask them to write down three important takeaways they got from the book. Read the second book. Once students have completed quiet writing time for the second book, come together and discuss as a class:

1. Were your predictions before reading each book accurate? What surprised you?
2. How are these books similar? How are they different? (Think genre, tone, art style, tense, voice, etc.)
3. Discuss the second half of *All About Nothing*; what does nothingness have to do with feelings? Lily in *Ten Beautiful Things* is dealing with big feelings; would she benefit from taking a break, ("Or a welcome break in a busy day") like the kid on page 15 of *All About Nothing*? Turn to page 24 of *All About Nothing* ("Or just the right amount") and remind students that maybe Lily needs just the right amount of nothingness—not too much, and not too little.

Mindfulness

1. **Introduce key concepts.** Lily thinks there's *nothing* beautiful in Iowa. Looking closer proves her wrong. This is a kind of mindfulness practice. Are you familiar with the word *mindfulness*? What do you think it means? What does mindfulness have to do with the idea of nothing? Remind students of page 15 in *All About Nothing*; sometimes you need a little nothingness when your day, your mind, or your feelings are particularly busy.
2. **Brainstorm practical applications.** Ask students to think of times when they need a little extra calm and positivity. Jot down suggestions on the whiteboard.

3. **Lead a "Ten Beautiful Things" mindfulness exercise.** As a group, take ten deep, slow breaths. With each breath, ask students to think of something beautiful. Invite them to picture it carefully, in as much detail as they can—it can be a beautiful sight, a beautiful sound, even a beautiful smell! They can think of a different beautiful thing with each breath, or the same thing, adding a little more detail each time they breathe in.

Place and Space

You will need two to three sheets of colored craft paper (darker colors preferred for better contrast), a sheet of white paper, and one pair of scissors per student. Older students may use an exacto knife and a cutting mat instead.

1. **Introduce the project.** Today students are going to use cut-paper art, just like the illustrations in *All About Nothing*, to make a piece of art about their home. Look at some examples of cut-paper art together for inspiration. Show a video or two of papercutters at work so that students can see some examples of technique.
2. **Brainstorm.** Encourage students to reflect on their home. What are the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures? What are local plants, animals, weather, and landscapes like? For older students: What symbols and ideas are associated with your home? Invite students to jot down notes and sketch what they want to show in their finished piece.
3. **Create.** Distribute materials and allow thirty to fifty minutes of free time for students to work on their pieces. When finished cutting their craft paper into their chosen design, students should glue the finished piece to their sheet of white paper to provide a contrasting backing.
4. **Post-project.** Celebrate students' hard work by sharing in small groups, presenting to the class, and/or displaying on the wall.

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More Resources and Activities

Explore more ideas and concepts from *All About Nothing* with these books and activities!

Reading

Lynn, Jacque, and Lydia Nichols. *Space Matters*. Clarion Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2020.

Griffin, Molly Beth, and Maribel Lechuga. *Ten Beautiful Things*. Charlesbridge, 2021.

Hanh, Nhat, and Wietske Vriezen. *A Handful of Quiet: Happiness in Four Pebbles*. Parallax Press, 2012.

Denos, Julia, and E. B. Goodale. *Here and Now*. HMH Books for Young Readers, 2021.

Art Activities

Happy Hooligans, "Stamping and Print-Making Activities for Kids" <https://happyhooligans.ca/stamping-activities-for-kids/>

Happy Hooligans, "Styrofoam Printmaking for Kids (Block Printing)" <https://happyhooligans.ca/styrofoam-printmaking/>

The House that Lars Built, "DIY Block Printing with a Potato" <https://thehousethatlarsbuilt.com/2020/05/diy-block-printing-with-potato.html/>

Let's Make Art LA, "Soap Carving for Kids/Beginners—Teddy Bear, Butterfly and Turtle" <https://youtu.be/mlonSS210Qs>

Dr. Martin McLoughlin, "Art project POSITIVE NEGATIVE SPACE": <https://www.pinterest.com/martmclaughlin/art-project-positive-negative-space/>

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "#MetKids—How to Make a Soap Carving" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y17RweezGi8>

Mystic Museum of Art, "Notan" <https://www.mysticmuseumofart.org/2020/05/notan/>

Zentangle <https://zentangle.com/>

SEL Activities

Share My Lesson, "Mindful Moments: Take Five" https://sharemylesson.com/teaching-resource/mindful-moments-take-five-278175?utm_source=MDR-WAT&utm_medium=website&utm_id=AFT_ShareMyLesson_2107_Art

Share My Lesson, "SEL Activity—Creating a Peace Place" https://sharemylesson.com/teaching-resource/creating-peace-place-sel?utm_source=MDR-WAT&utm_medium=website&utm_id=AFT_ShareMyLesson_2107_Art

Math Activities

Bowls and Number Cards

Ask each child to make a few cards with 0 written on them. Take a set of 8–10 bowls and arrange them in a line. In a few of the bowls place a piece of candy or any other object. Each child needs to place the number 0 card in front of the bowls that are empty.

Trees without Apples

This activity can be done as a bulletin board activity or a whiteboard activity. Draw or make a set of trees. Inside some of the trees, draw some apples. Invite students up to write the number zero under any tree that has no apples.

Simon Says Zero

All players start at one end of an open space such as a gym, hallway, or field. When you call out "One," each player must take one step. If you call out "Zero," players must stay where they are. If a child steps when you call out "Zero," they are out of the game. In this manner, children must try to stay in the game until they reach the end of the room or field.