The Buy Nothing movement

Read about the Buy Nothing movement and answer the questions to practise and improve your reading skills.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the text and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary	Definitions
1. ..... overconsumption	a. to hit someone with a lot of something, without pausing
2. ..... disposable	b. designed to be thrown away after use
3. ..... consumerism	c. a place where rubbish is buried under the ground
4. ..... to bombard	d. to appear
5. ..... to spring up	e. the practice of buying and owning lots of products
6. ..... a landfill site	f. the act of spending more money than you should
7. ..... overspending	g. using too much of something
8. ..... an influencer	h. someone who uses social media to advertise products to their followers

Reading text: The Buy Nothing movement

Social media, magazines and shop windows bombard people daily with things to buy, and British consumers are buying more clothes and shoes than ever before. Online shopping means it is easy for customers to buy without thinking, while major brands offer such cheap clothes that they can be treated like disposable items – worn two or three times and then thrown away.

In Britain, the average person spends more than £1,000 on new clothes a year, which is around four per cent of their income. That might not sound like much, but that figure hides two far more worrying trends for society and for the environment. First, a lot of that consumer spending is via credit cards. British people currently owe approximately £670 per adult to credit card companies. That's 66 per cent of the average wardrobe budget. Also, not only are people spending money they don't have, they're using it to buy things they don't need. Britain throws away 300,000 tons of clothing a year, most of which goes into landfill sites.

People might not realise they are part of the disposable clothing problem because they donate their unwanted clothes to charities. But charity shops can't sell all those unwanted clothes. 'Fast fashion' goes out of fashion as quickly as it came in and is often too poor quality to recycle; people don't want to buy it second-hand. Huge quantities end up being thrown away, and a lot of clothes that charities can't sell are sent abroad, causing even more economic and environmental problems.

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However, a different trend is springing up in opposition to consumerism – the 'buy nothing' trend. The idea originated in Canada in the early 1990s and then moved to the US, where it became a rejection of the overspending and overconsumption of Black Friday and Cyber Monday during Thanksgiving weekend. On Buy Nothing Day people organise various types of protests and cut up their credit cards. Throughout the year, Buy Nothing groups organise the exchange and repair of items they already own.

The trend has now reached influencers on social media who usually share posts of clothing and make-up that they recommend for people to buy. Some YouTube stars now encourage their viewers not to buy anything at all for periods as long as a year. Two friends in Canada spent a year working towards buying only food. For the first three months they learned how to live without buying electrical goods, clothes or things for the house. For the next stage, they gave up services, for example haircuts, eating out at restaurants or buying petrol for their cars. In one year, they'd saved $55,000.

The changes they made meant two fewer cars on the roads, a reduction in plastic and paper packaging and a positive impact on the environment from all the energy saved. If everyone followed a similar plan, the results would be impressive. But even if you can't manage a full year without going shopping, you can participate in the anti-consumerist movement by refusing to buy things you don't need. Buy Nothing groups send a clear message to
companies that people are no longer willing to accept the environmental and human cost of overconsumption.

Tasks

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false? Write T or F

1. People buy clothes because they want to throw them away.

2. The writer thinks it is worrying that people spend money on things they do not need.

3. The amount the average Briton owes on credit cards is one third of the amount they spend on clothes each year.

4. Only a very small proportion of unwanted clothes are thrown away.

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5. Charities can find ways to use clothes even if they are not very good quality.

6. Buy Nothing Day is a protest against credit cards.

7. The two friends who did the 'buy nothing' experiment only bought food for 12 months.

8. If everyone followed the Buy Nothing idea, the environment would benefit.

Task 2

Complete the sentences with words from the box.

sites	hand	spending
shops	fashion	away

1. Fast _____ is made quickly and cheaply.
2. Some clothing is so cheap that people can afford to wear it a couple of times and throw it _____ .
3. There is a worrying trend for more consumers _____ on credit cards.
4. Giving clothes to charity _____ does not completely solve the problem.
5. Make sure you only donate clothes that people will want to buy second-_____
6. A lot of clothes donated to charity cannot be reused and end up in landfill _____

Discussion

What do you think about the buy nothing trend?

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