

# The Boy Who Stopped Talking

## Study Notes



**Directed by:** Ben Sombogaart

**Certificate:** PG

**Running time:** 108 mins

**Release date:** 10 October 1996

### Synopsis

Mohammed (or Memo as his friends and family call him) is a young Kurdish boy living with his mother and sister in a small village in the east of Turkey. He is contented, delivering the post, playing his flute, tending to the sheep and playing with his friends. Soon, his sheltered existence is to change forever. Hearing of the violent conflict in the area, Memo's father, who has been living and working in Holland to provide for his beloved family, comes back to Turkey to fetch them. As a family, they move back to the safety of Holland. Memo finds the change and unfamiliarity deeply unsettling and, desperate to go home, he refuses to speak anymore. Those around him, including his new friend, Jeroen, try to encourage him out of his silence but it is not until the use of his voice becomes a matter of life and death that he slowly begins to open up...

## Who Made It?

Ben Sombogaart directed *The Boy Who Stopped Talking*. He was born in Amsterdam and has made lots of Dutch films. His film *Twin Sisters* (2002) was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

## A Bit of History

Memo and his family is Kurdish. Kurdistan is the name given to the area where the Kurdish people live, covering parts of Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Iran. It is not a country. Sometimes there are fights between the Kurdish people and the country in which they are based. In the 1980s and 1990s, an extremely violent civil war took place in Turkish Kurdistan, in which more than 37,000 people were killed. Villages were completely destroyed and many people had to find a new place to live. Since 1999, with the help of the European Union, the situation has been better, as there is more acceptance of Kurdish culture and the Kurdish people have a new leader.

## Production

Ben Sombogaart filmed Memo looking out of the window in his house a lot. He did this to make it look like Memo was looking at a cinema screen-like window, watching other people.

Though set in Holland and eastern Turkey, *The Boy Who Stopped Talking* was actually shot in Belgium and Morocco.

## What Happened Next

Ben Sombogaart made lots of very successful films and was nominated for awards. *The Boy Who Stopped Talking* won awards at both the Berlin and San Francisco International Film Festivals as well as at the Mons International Festival of Love Films.

## Look Out For

The new things that Memo and his family have to get used to when they come to Holland. For example, they do not know what a doorbell is.

What other examples can you find?

## Talking Points

- Look for Kurdistan on a map. The Kurdish people have no specific country to call their own. How might it feel to not know where your home is?
- Why do you think Memo decides to stop talking?
- Do you think you would have told the Police about Kemal if you were Memo? Why?
- Do you think Memo experiences any racism? When?
- 'Children are the same all over the world'. Do you agree with this statement?

## Other films you might like

An American Tale (1986)

The First Movie (2009)

Bend It Like Beckham (2002)

The Story of the Weeping Camel (2003)