

## READING CHALLENGE

# The Village Where People Speak in Whistles

*In a Turkish mountain village, people talk by whistling*

<b>Level</b>	A1 — Beginner
<b>Age Group</b>	Teens (11-16)
<b>Topic</b>	True Stories
<b>Duration</b>	~8 min read
<b>Skill</b>	Reading

Put your fingers in your mouth. Blow. Can you **whistle**? In most places, a whistle is just a sound. Maybe you whistle a song. Maybe you whistle to call your dog. But in one small village in Turkey, a whistle is much more than a sound. It is a language. People use whistles to say real words. They use whistles to have real conversations. And their whistles can travel for kilometres across the mountains.

## A Village in the Mountains

The village is called Kuşköy. In Turkish, this means "Bird Village." It is in the mountains of Giresun Province, in the northeast of Turkey, near the Black Sea. The area is very beautiful. There are green forests, high mountains, and deep **valleys**. Tea grows on the hillsides. Small rivers run through the valleys.

But the land is also very **steep**. The houses are far apart. One house can be on one side of a valley. The next house can be on the other side. The **distance** between them is not very big — maybe one or two kilometres. But to walk from one house to the other, you have to go all the way down the mountain and then all the way back up. That can take an hour or more.

This is a **remote** place. There were no roads for a long time. There were no telephones. So how did people talk to each other? They could shout. But a human voice can only travel about 100 metres in the mountains. That is not enough. So the people of Kuşköy found a better way. They learned to whistle.

## The Bird Language

The whistle language of Kuşköy is called "kuş dili" in Turkish. This means "bird language." But it is not the language of birds. It is real Turkish — the same words, the same sentences — but spoken in whistles instead of voice. Every Turkish sound has a whistle version. A person who knows kuş dili can say anything in whistles. "Come here." "Dinner is ready." "The sheep are lost." "I need help." Anything.

The whistles are very loud. Much louder than a shout. A good whistler can **communicate** over a distance of up to five kilometres. The sound travels across the valleys. It bounces off the mountains. The **echo** helps carry the sound even further.

How do they whistle so loudly? They put their fingers in their mouth. Or they cup their hands around their mouth. They use their tongue, their teeth, and their lips to shape the sounds. It takes years to learn. Children in Kuşköy start learning when they are about five or six years old. By the time they are teenagers, they can have full conversations in whistles.

## Who Used the Whistle Language?

For hundreds of years, everyone in Kuşköy used kuş dili. Farmers used it to talk to each other across the fields. **Shepherds** used it to communicate while watching their animals on the **meadows** high in the mountains. Mothers called their children home for dinner. Friends made plans for the weekend. People shared news — who was getting married, who had a new baby, who needed help with their garden.

It was also useful in emergencies. If someone was hurt or lost in the mountains, a whistle message could travel from village to village in minutes. Each person who heard the whistle

would repeat it for the next person. Like a chain of sound across the mountains.

The whistle language was not a secret code. Everyone in the area understood it. It was just a normal part of life. As normal as talking. Children grew up hearing it every day. They learned it from their parents and grandparents. Each **generation** taught the next.

## A Language in Danger

But today, kuş dili is in trouble. The biggest problem? **Mobile phones**. When mobile phones arrived in the villages, people stopped whistling. Why whistle across a valley when you can send a text message? Why learn a difficult skill when you can just make a phone call?

Young people are also leaving the villages. They move to cities like Istanbul, Ankara, or Trabzon for work and education. In the city, there are no mountains to whistle across. The language has no use there. So they do not teach it to their children.

Thirty years ago, about 10,000 people could speak kuş dili. Today, the number is much smaller. Most of the people who still know it are older — 50, 60, 70 years old. If they do not teach it to young people, the language will **disappear**. It will be gone forever.

## Saving the Whistle Language

People are trying to save kuş dili. In 2017, UNESCO added it to a special list. The list is called the "Intangible Cultural **Heritage** of Humanity." This means the world recognises that kuş dili is important and needs **protection**.

The Turkish government is also helping. Since 2014, some schools in Giresun Province teach kuş dili as a subject. Children have lessons where they learn to whistle words and sentences. They practise in the schoolyard. They have competitions to see who can whistle the farthest and the clearest.

Every year, Kuşköy holds a festival. It is called the "Bird Language Festival." People come from all over Turkey and from other countries. They watch demonstrations of the whistle language. They try to **imitate** the sounds. Old masters show their skills. It is a celebration of this unique tradition.

## Whistle Languages Around the World

Kuşköy is the most famous, but it is not the only place with a whistle language. The island of La Gomera in the Canary Islands, Spain, has a whistle language called "Silbo Gomero." Like kuş dili, it was created because the island has deep valleys and steep mountains. Silbo Gomero is taught in all schools on the island. Every child learns it.

There are also whistle languages in Mexico, in the mountains of Oaxaca. And in some parts of West Africa, like Ghana and Cameroon. And in Papua New Guinea. Scientists have found whistle languages in more than 70 places around the world. They all developed for the same reason: people lived in mountains or forests where normal voices could not travel far enough.

## Why It Matters

Some people ask: "Why save a whistle language? We have phones now." But a language is more than just a way to send messages. It is part of who people are. It is their history. It is their identity. When a language disappears, something beautiful is lost. We can never get it back.

The whistle language of Kuşköy is also interesting for science. Scientists study it to understand how the human brain processes language. They have found that the brain treats whistle language the same way it treats spoken language. The whistles are not just sounds. They are real language, processed in the language centres of the brain.

So next time you whistle a tune, think about the people of Kuşköy. Think about a village where a whistle is not just a sound. It is a voice. It carries news across valleys. It calls children home. It connects people across mountains. It is hundreds of years old. And if we are lucky, it will be here for hundreds of years more.

## Vocabulary

#	Word	Definition
1	<b>whistle</b>	to make a high sound by pushing air through your lips
2	<b>valley</b>	a low area of land between two hills or mountains
3	<b>steep</b>	going up or down at a very sharp angle, like the side of a mountain
4	<b>communicate</b>	to share information with another person, by talking, writing, or using signs
5	<b>distance</b>	how far it is from one place to another
6	<b>shepherd</b>	a person who takes care of sheep
7	<b>heritage</b>	important traditions and culture from the past
8	<b>disappear</b>	to stop existing or to become impossible to see or find
9	<b>generation</b>	all the people who are about the same age, like parents or grandchildren
10	<b>meadow</b>	a field of grass, often with flowers
11	<b>mobile phone</b>	a small telephone you can carry with you everywhere
12	<b>echo</b>	a sound that repeats because it bounces off something like a wall or a mountain
13	<b>imitate</b>	to copy what someone does or how something sounds
14	<b>protect</b>	to keep something safe from danger or damage
15	<b>remote</b>	far away from cities and towns, difficult to reach

## Comprehension Quiz

### 1. Where is the village of Kuşköy?

- A) In southern Turkey, near the sea
- B) In the mountains of northern Turkey, near the Black Sea
- C) In the centre of Istanbul
- D) In Greece, near the Turkish border

### 2. Why did the villagers start using a whistle language?

- A) Because they liked music
- B) Because they wanted to talk to birds
- C) Because the mountains are steep and voices cannot travel far enough
- D) Because they did not know how to speak Turkish

### 3. How far can the whistle language travel?

- A) About 100 metres
- B) About 500 metres
- C) Up to 5 kilometres
- D) Up to 50 kilometres

### 4. What is 'kuş dili'?

- A) A type of food in Turkey
- B) The Turkish name for the whistle language — it means 'bird language'
- C) A song that children sing at school
- D) The name of a mountain in Turkey

### 5. Why is the whistle language in danger of disappearing?

- A) Because the mountains are getting smaller
- B) Because the government banned it
- C) Because young people use mobile phones instead
- D) Because nobody can hear it anymore

## Answer Key

Q	Answer	Question
1	<b>B</b>	Where is the village of Kuşköy?
2	<b>C</b>	Why did the villagers start using a whistle language?
3	<b>C</b>	How far can the whistle language travel?
4	<b>B</b>	What is 'kuş dili'?
5	<b>C</b>	Why is the whistle language in danger of disappearing?