

Story 1970 (1992 Tape 4)

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Location: Kırklareli, capital of Kırklareli Province (a Black Sea or Laz province)

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More Laz¹ Sign Language Misunderstood

One day the public-schools inspector was examining orally the first grade of the elementary school attended by Temel.² The inspector asked every pupil a question, and most of the answers that they gave were correct. This made their teacher feel very proud of them.

Temel was one of the laziest pupils in that class, and when his turn came to be examined, the inspector said to him, "Tell me, my child, what is the material that this wood-burning heater is made of?"

When it became clear that Temel did not know the answer to that question, his teacher tried to give him a hint. The teacher ran her

¹The word Laz referred originally to an ethnic minority living primarily in Trabzon and Rize provinces, along the extreme eastern part of the Turkish Black Sea coast. More recently the word has come to be applied to any resident of the entire Turkish Black Sea coast. In the Turkish oral tradition Laz people are stereotyped as being stupid or inept. This stereotype (like most others) is unjustifiable, for Lazes are, of course, much like other people.

²In tales about the stereotyped Laz as dummer or fool, the male characters usually have one or another of five or six very common Laz names. Temel is the name used most often, with Dursun in second place. Thus if either of these names occurs in a folktale, the audience knows at once that it is a Laz tale.

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fingers through her hair to try to suggest the kind of material used to construct the heater. The word for hair [saç] sounds the same as or very close to the same as the word for sheet iron [saç or sac].

Temel still remained silent. The inspector then repeated his question. “Yes, my son, of what material is this heater made?”

This time Temel answered confidently, “The heater is made of strands of hair.”