



## No Word for Worry Discussion Guide

Director: Runar Jarle Wiik

Year: 2014

Time: 90 min

### You might know this director from:

This is the first feature-length feature documentary from this director. To learn more read his biography at [projectmoken.com/director-runar-jarle-wiik/](http://projectmoken.com/director-runar-jarle-wiik/)

## FILM SUMMARY

When the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami struck, the Moken people survived. Reading the signs offered up by the retracting ocean, the silenced cicadas, and the still wind, they sought high ground. The world became interested in these “people immersed in water,” and how they managed to see what the scientific community had missed.

The lifestyle of this indigenous people has remained unchanged for the 4,000 years since they moved to the Andaman Sea. Living in kabang boats atop the open ocean, the Moken are one with the water. Diving deeper and longer than the rest of us could imagine, they know no word for possession, thank you, hello... or worry.

NO WORD FOR WORRY introduces us to Hook and his dwindling tribe. Since their home in the Surin Islands became a national park in 1981, and the Thai authorities illegalized the practices around which they survive - including harvesting trees to build kabang, deep-sea fishing, and traveling amongst the islands - these stateless people suffer in extreme poverty as their culture declines. Robbed of their watery lifestyle, they are left to make do with civilization’s scraps. And in turn, the Moken are dwindling away.

On a quest to comprehend the increasingly threatened survival of his people, Hook sails to Myanmar in search of a tree to build a kabang. As one man in Myanmar explains to him, “The old people are dying out. In the future there may not be any Moken,” Hook struggles to make sense of the senseless world that has outlawed his people’s peaceful ways. Stunning underwater imagery silences us, inviting us to contemplate the famine caused by our impulsive ways. The threatened state of the Moken is cause for worry, not only for the people so devastated by the modern world but for us, the contemporary class, so quick to conquer and consume. Should we override the indigenous, we bare ourselves helpless in the face of the overwhelmingly powerful natural world.

## FILM THEMES

A peaceful people, the Moken have existed as one with the ocean for thousands of years. Now forbidden from living according to the ways of their ancestors, they find themselves gazing towards a fading future.

### THE OCEAN

In the film's opening sequence, Hook glides beneath the sea, unaided by diving equipment, relying only on an internal compass, a pair of goggles, and a respect for Mother Ocean. *NO WORD FOR WORRY* offers breathing space for the sea, expressing the intrinsic life-giving relationship the Moken have with the ocean by stripping the screen of language and allowing the powerful majesty of water to prevail. As most of us live earth-bound existences, only accessing the ocean for play or food, comprehending a life at sea is difficult. The Moken remain a mystery. By displaying the ocean as a powerful yet tranquil, vast yet accessible, wild yet soothing entity, the film plunges us into the Moken world.

### IDENTITY AND BELONGING

With the things that constitute a Moken existence being outlawed, they grapple for something to hold on to. Many enter the modern world, working on fishing boats or sinking beneath their skills in the tourist industry. Moken traditions fade into the horizon as the modern world imposes itself upon their non-invasive lifestyle. Faced with the illegality of living according to the ways of the open ocean, Hook grappled with taking an industry job or remaining hands-tied in the national park he called home. "If Hook wants to be Thai, his Moken life is over... He will be like a foreigner," stated his father. The choice was not simple, and Hook continues on his journey to locate identity and a sense of belonging.

### IMPRISONMENT

Without nationality, without property or possessions or the ability to use any of their traditional skills to survive, the Moken are imprisoned. The fact that they are now bound to land, unable to harvest trees to make the kabang boats on which they have always lived translates into isolation, impoverishment, and devastation. The Moken are powerless, referred to as "chao lay" or "sea gypsies" by the Thai, a derogatory term. When asked about their rights, Hook replied, "People can do what they want to us and nothing will happen to them." The Moken have been suppressed to a borderline sub-human existence, held hostage, haunting the once fruitful sea they called home.

### LOVE AND LOSS

With a deep respect for his culture and a longing to preserve and enable his people, Hook set out for Myanmar in search of a tree to build a kabang, a symbol of a thriving Moken people. Surrounded by loss and yet filled with love, he struggles to make sense of his options. Accepting a commercial job from a Thai company, he finds himself spiritually impoverished yet occupied. If he could let go of the threatened strands of his Moken identity, he could settle into a modern life and disregard his roots. Yet the love he maintains for the traditions of his people courses deep in his blood. Through this love, he experiences great loss.

**"You ask me if I'm worried about the future. Moken have no word for worry. We live from day to day. The future is not a concept for people who live with the sea."**

Nguk Suriyan Katale (Hook)

**"On the ocean, I'm not afraid of anything. If something happens, I'm fine as long as I can sail and row. What scares me are people."**

Nguk Suriyan Katale (Hook)



## FILM FACTS:

- The remaining Moken, estimated anywhere between 2,000 and 3,000 individuals, live in the Andaman Sea on the west coast of Thailand, in the provinces of Satun, Trang, Krabi, Phuket, Phang Nga, and Ranong, and up through the Mergui Archipelago of Myanmar. Approximately 150 Moken live on the Surin Islands in the Andaman Sea, 35 miles off the coast of Thailand, where Hook lives. Since 1981, the five islands have been protected as a national park called the Mu Ko Surin National Park, home to Richelieu Rock, one of the most famous diving sites in the world, known for its purple coral and apparently discovered by Jacques-Yves Cousteau.
- Living at sea as much if not more than on land, the Moken consider the ocean their home. Without scuba gear, they are able to gather food on the ocean floor at depths of up to 75 feet (23 meters). Most Moken children learn to swim before they walk and although their eyesight is the same as European children on land, they have incredible underwater vision, twice as good as European children of the same age.
- The traditional sailing craft of the Moken, the kabang is named after parts of the human body, including la-kae (stomach), ta-bin (cheek), tu-koh (neck), ba-hoy (shoulder), and ta-bing (ribs).
- The Moken do not have a written language, and history is passed down verbally. As the culture is based around concepts of sharing and giving, they have no words for individual possession.
- The reefs surrounding the Surin Islands include over 128 species of corals, 205 species of fish, and 118 species of other marine organisms.
- Animism, the belief system practiced by the Moken, states that there is no separation between the spiritual and material worlds and that souls are found not only in humans but also in animals, plants, rocks, and other aspects of the natural environment. The Moken have a great understanding of natural resources, using over 80 plant species for food, 28 for medicinal purposes, and 105 for shelter and handicrafts.
- Every April the Moken celebrate Lobong - or the spirit pole festival - when they worship their ancestors, offering gifts including rice flour cakes, alcohol, betel nuts, and sod.
- Traditionally, during the monsoon season, the Moken built temporary villages on land.
- The Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami - known by the scientific community as the Sumatra-Andaman earthquake - which took place on December 26, 2004, claimed over 230,000 lives and left many others missing. The Moken, who live in the Andaman Sea, were able to forecast the disaster. Referring to the tsunami as Laboon, "the wave that eats people," ancient Moken lore claims that before the tsunami hits, the sea recedes and the singing of cicadas ceases. Noticing the silence, the Moken fled to higher ground and sustained no casualties.

## WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Contribute** to the [Indiegogo](#) campaign raising funds to provide a vessel on which some Moken can once again make a living on the sea, and we all can benefit from their knowledge in our modern day challenges of ocean pollution.
2. **Add** your namen to [Once The Moken Tree](#) project. Once it has 10,000 signatures, a petition will be sent to the Thai government demanding implementation of the indigenous rights of the Moken.
3. **Consider** donating to [the Moken fund](#), which sets out to create a sustainable future through work including providing salaries for those preserving the Moken culture.
4. **Learn** more about [Survival](#), a global movement championing tribal peoples' rights, that has a gallery of Moken related projects and movements.
5. **Consider** donating to [the Human Rights Watch](#) and their campaign for the Moken.

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