

3.8.2 The postman of emotions

Brief description, and rules of the game

In this adapted version of the postman game, children "deliver" emotional messages to each other. The messages contain emotional situations, and the receiver must guess and react to the emotion, helping the group learn to name, interpret, and empathise with various feelings.

Skill focus

Primary Skill Focus

- Empathy

Complementary/Secondary Skill Focus

- Emotional awareness, regulation and communication
- Connectedness

Age group	Student number	Duration
6-10 years old	8-20 children	25-35 minutes

How to play - brief game rules

1. Preparation: the teacher prepares a set of small cards, each containing a short emotional scenario (e.g., "You've lost your favourite toy", "Your friend gave you a surprise gift", "You have to speak in front of the class"). These are folded and placed in a bag or envelope.
2. Form the group: children sit in a circle. One child is selected to be the Postman and stands in the middle holding the envelope or bag with the emotion scenario cards.
3. Delivering the letter: the Postman walks around the circle, stops at a random child, and says: "A letter for you!" They hand the child one card from the bag.
4. Reading and acting: the selected child reads the card silently, thinks about how the character might feel, and then acts out the emotion without saying the emotion's name. They can use:
 - facial expressions
 - gestures or posture
 - a short phrase (e.g., "Why did this happen to me?")
5. Guessing the emotion: the rest of the group watches carefully and tries to guess:
 - What emotion is being expressed?
 - What might have caused it?
6. Confirmation and reflection: once the correct emotion is guessed, the child confirms it and may choose to add a comment like:

"Yes, I was nervous because everyone was looking at me."
7. New round: a new Postman is selected, and the game continues with another delivery.
8. Extension (optional): As the game progresses, the teacher can:
 - introduce more complex or mixed emotions
 - encourage brief group reflections on how emotions are expressed and recognized

Indoor/Outdoor Classroom layout notes

This activity works best outdoors, in a spacious garden or schoolyard, where children can move freely between stations (representing different "houses"). However, it can also be adapted for indoor play using clearly marked areas in a large classroom or gym.

How does this game develop the primary skill?

This game strengthens empathy and emotional awareness by encouraging children to recognize and express emotions in a non-verbal and creative way. Each child must interpret an emotional situation, imagine how it feels, and translate that inner state into gestures, posture, or tone of voice. This process develops their ability to identify emotions in themselves and others, even when they are not explicitly named.

As children observe their peers and try to guess the emotion, they learn to pay attention to subtle emotional cues and body language. This sharpens their observational skills and builds a richer emotional vocabulary.

The game also promotes empathy by inviting children to imagine the experiences behind each emotion. When they guess or reflect on what the character might be feeling and why, they practice putting themselves in someone else's shoes. Over time, this builds greater sensitivity to others' emotions in real-life situations.

The playful and safe context helps even shy or quiet children feel comfortable expressing themselves and seeing emotions as a normal and shared human experience.

What do we want to achieve regarding primary skill development (student understanding and/or behaviour)?

After playing this game, students will be able to:

- Recognize the emotions expressed by others through facial expressions, tone, and movement.
- Recognize and label their own basic emotions in ways appropriate for their age.
- Communicate their emotions using gestures, storytelling, and simple verbal expressions.
- Use age-appropriate emotional vocabulary during group interactions.

Suggested use, and practical examples

Use this game to introduce or reinforce emotional vocabulary, especially in early primary grades. It can be a playful way to explore empathy by encouraging children to reflect on which emotion "belongs" to which character or context.

Example: During a unit on friendship, the postman delivers emotional messages between fictional friends. Children must decide how to respond kindly to someone feeling lonely or angry.

It also works well as a circle time warm-up or end-of-day reflection.

Materials and tools needed for implementation

- A bag or box labelled "Postman's Bag"
- 20–30 folded cards with short emotional situations written on them (can be illustrated for younger children)
- A chair or soft hat for the postman (optional, to add a playful ritual)

Guiding questions

- What do you think the character in your envelope is feeling?
- Why might someone feel this way?
- Have you ever felt like this? When?
- How would you help someone who feels like that?

Tips and Tricks for dealing with challenges

- **Challenge:** Some children may struggle to express an emotion clearly or may feel embarrassed.
Tip: The teacher can support them with simple prompts like “Think of a moment when you felt this way” or “How would your body look if you felt this emotion?”
- **Challenge:** Some children may exaggerate their emotional expressions.
Tip: The teacher can guide a short conversation about how real emotions are often more subtle and can vary greatly between individuals.
- **Challenge:** Some children will guess emotions quickly, while others need more time to reflect.
Tip: The teacher should validate both approaches and encourage exploration through questions like “What else could this child be feeling?”
- **Challenge:** The teacher plays a key role in creating a safe emotional climate.
Tip: If giggles or discomfort arise, they should be addressed warmly, reinforcing that all emotions are normal and that interpreting them takes practice and kindness.
- **Challenge:** Children who feel shy or hesitant may need additional modelling or examples.
Tip: The teacher can provide simple emotional scenarios to help them participate more confidently and expand their emotional vocabulary.

Difficulty level tailoring

Beginners (6-7 years old): Benefit from cards with simple, familiar situations and visual icons (like a sad face or a gift). The teacher can read the cards aloud and help them express the emotion through mimicry and gestures.

Advanced learners (8-9 years old): More complex scenarios can be introduced — for instance, ambiguous feelings like “You’re happy your friend won, but also a bit jealous”. These situations allow richer emotional discussion and more sophisticated expression.

Experts (9–10 years old): Older children can also write their own emotional messages to add to the postman’s bag.

Debriefing and reflection questions

- How did it feel to receive and act out someone else's emotion?
- Was it easy to guess what others were feeling? Why or why not?
- Did you ever feel unsure about an emotion? What helped you decide?
- How do you think we can use this skill in the classroom or with friends?
- Can two people feel different emotions in the same situation? What does that tell us?
- Is it easy or hard to guess emotions? Why?