

3.1.2 The Witch Commands an Emotion

Brief description, and rules of the game

This game is a variation of the classic Italian children's game Strega Comanda Colore, where instead of finding a specific colour, children must express or act out emotions to avoid being caught by the "witch" (the chaser). It helps children develop emotional awareness in a playful and engaging way.

Skill focus

- **Primary Skill Focus**
 - Emotional awareness, regulation and communication
- **Complementary/Secondary Skill Focus**
 - Empathy
 - Resilience
 - Creativity

Age group	Student number	Duration
6-10 years old	6 to 20 children	15-25 minutes

How to play - brief game rules

1. Select one child to be the “Witch” and have them stand in the centre of the playing area (indoor or outdoor).
2. The rest of the children move around freely, walking or skipping within the space, making sure to stay alert.
3. At a chosen moment, the Witch loudly calls out:
Witch commands emotion... [name of an emotion]!”
(For example: “Witch commands emotion... joy!”)
4. All other children must immediately stop and express the emotion through:
 - Facial expression (e.g., a big smile for joy)
 - Body language (e.g., jumping with excitement)
 - A short, mimed situation (e.g., pretending to open a birthday gift)
5. While they express the emotion, the Witch tries to tag someone before they begin their expression.
6. If a child is tagged before expressing the emotion, they become “frozen” and must stand still in place.
7. Another player can unfreeze the frozen child by:
 - Touching them
 - Saying a real-life situation where someone might feel that emotion (e.g., “You feel joy when your dog runs to greet you!”)
8. The game continues with new emotions chosen by the Witch each round.
9. After a few rounds, rotate roles so that different children have the chance to be the Witch.
10. The game ends when each child has had a turn or after a set time limit.

Indoor/Outdoor Classroom layout notes

Outdoor: Ideally played in a large, flat area like a playground or grassy field, where children have space to run safely. Use cones or chalk to define the play area and ensure a safe boundary. The atmosphere should encourage free movement and creativity while remaining within the rules.

Indoor: Suitable for a gymnasium, sports hall, or a cleared-out classroom. Use tape on the floor to mark safe zones or a playing boundary. If space is limited, the game can be adapted with walking or mimed expressions instead of running, maintaining focus on emotional expression and peer observation.

How does this game develop the primary skill?

This game helps children develop emotional awareness by requiring them to quickly recognize and express a specific emotion through body language, facial expressions, or role-play. Because the emotion is chosen randomly and must be expressed immediately, children learn to connect feelings with physical cues in a spontaneous and embodied way.

The added challenge of being tagged creates mild pressure, helping children practice identifying and expressing emotions even in dynamic situations. The "frozen" rule reinforces emotional recognition through peer interaction, as children must think of real-life examples where someone might experience that feeling. This deepens their understanding of emotions in context and supports perspective-taking.

By taking turns in different roles – expressing emotions, interpreting others' expressions, and giving examples – children enhance their ability to observe, understand, and name emotions, both in themselves and in others.

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

As a result of this activity, students will:

- Be able to identify and distinguish emotions that are familiar to them.
- Be able to express emotions through facial expressions, gestures, and body language in ways that can be clearly observed by others.
- Be able to regulate and control their emotional reactions in moments of challenge or temporary "freeze," continuing to act even when experiencing a negative emotion.
- Understand and be aware that emotions can be expressed in multiple ways and that these expressions can be interpreted by others.
- Understand and be aware that their peers may recognise and respond to their emotional expressions during the game.

Suggested use, and practical examples

In one round, the witch calls out "witch commands emotion... fear!" Some children might widen their eyes and freeze in place, while others might hide behind their hands or crouch as if scared. A child who gets tagged and frozen might be freed when a friend says, "People feel fear when they hear a loud noise in the dark."

In another round, the chosen emotion is "pride." Some children stand tall with their hands on their hips, while others smile and pretend to show off a trophy. One player, unsure of how to express it, looks around for inspiration. After the round, the teacher helps them reflect by asking, "What does pride feel like in your body? Can you think of a time you were proud?"

Another interesting scenario arises when the witch commands "jealousy." Some children struggle to act it out at first, but soon they start mimicking looking at someone else's toy with folded arms or sighing. This leads to a discussion about how jealousy can be hard to recognize but is something everyone experiences at times.

Materials and tools needed for implementation

- A spacious playing area where children can run freely
- A list or cards with emotions (optional, to help the witch choose emotions)
- A timer or whistle (optional, to regulate rounds if needed)

Guiding questions

- What are different ways we can express the same emotion?
- How do our faces and bodies help others understand what we feel?
- Can we feel more than one emotion at a time? What does that look like?
- What clues do we use to guess how someone else is feeling?

Tips and Tricks for dealing with challenges

- **Challenge:** Some children might struggle to quickly express an emotion, especially those they are less familiar with (such as embarrassment or frustration).
Tip: The teacher can encourage them by offering simple prompts, such as "Think about a time when you felt that way," or "How would your body look if you were really excited?"
- **Challenge:** There may also be instances where children exaggerate their expressions, making emotions appear unrealistic or overly dramatic.
Tip: In these cases, the teacher can facilitate a short discussion about how real emotions are often more subtle and can vary between individuals.
- **Challenge:** Some players may have difficulty thinking of real-life examples when trying to "rescue" frozen peers.
Tip: The teacher can model examples, such as "People feel disappointment when they lose a game" or "Pride happens when we do something difficult successfully." This helps expand children's emotional vocabulary and recognition skills.
- **Challenge:** Lastly, younger or more sensitive children might get frustrated if tagged frequently.
Tip: To ensure inclusion and engagement, the teacher can modify the rule so that frozen players are released automatically after a short time, regardless of peer intervention.

Difficulty level tailoring

Beginners (6-7 years old): It helps to demonstrate each emotion before the game starts. The teacher can go through common emotions one by one with the group, ensuring they recognize how to act them out before playing.

Advanced learners (8-9 years old): The game can include more complex emotions like frustration, jealousy, or relief. After each round, the teacher can briefly ask, “Who has felt this emotion before? When?” to encourage deeper reflection.

Experts (9–10 years old): An advanced version of the game could require children to pair emotions with a situation as they express them. Instead of simply making a happy face, for example, they could also say, “I’m happy because I won a prize.” This enhances emotional literacy and connects emotions to real-life experiences.

Debriefing and reflection questions

- Which emotions were easiest to express? Which were harder? Why?
- Did you notice differences in how people expressed the same emotion?
- Have you ever felt frozen in real life, like when you didn’t know how to react to an emotion?
- How did you feel when you were ‘frozen’ in the game? How did it feel when someone helped you?
- Why is it important to recognise emotions in others? How can this help us in everyday life?
- How can games like this help us notice and respect others’ emotions in real life?