ACTIVATING LESSON SCENARIO
developed as part of the project

'INNOVATIONS IN SCHOOL EDUCATION'

TOPIC

Disinformation Simulation – Educational Game "Unmask the Fake News!"

1. Lesson Objectives

The student:

- understands how fake news is created and spreads,
- is able to recognize false information in a simulation setting,
- practices fact-checking and teamwork skills,
- develops critical thinking and quick reaction to disinformation,
- knows tools and strategies needed to debunk false content online.

2. Target Group

- Primary school students

3. Teaching Methods

- Simulation (educational game)
- Group work
- Moderated discussion
- Case analysis
- Mini individual reflection

4. Teaching Aids / Sources

- Sets of simulation cards (fake news and true news in the form of printed posts, screenshots)
- "Fact-Checker Tools" cards (list of guidelines: how to check source, photos, author)
- Whiteboard or flipchart
- Access to mobile devices or computers (optional for quick online verification)
- Fact-checking platforms:
  - PL: Demagog.org.pl, Konkret24
  - CZ: Manipulátoři.cz, Demagog.cz
  - SK: Demagog.sk, Infosecurity.sk
  - EU: EUvsDisinfo.eu, EDMO.eu

5. Lesson Course (duration: 45 min)

1. Introduction – What is a Disinformation Simulation? (5 min)

Form: short introduction + brainstorming

Course:

1. Teacher's introduction (2 min):
   - The teacher explains that the class will take the form of an educational game – a simulation in which students will take on three roles:
     - **Journalists** – publishing news,
     - **Recipients** – deciding what to share further,
     - **Fact-checkers** – verifying truthfulness of content.
   - The aim of the game is to understand the mechanism of how disinformation spreads and to learn how to recognize and stop it.
   - Emphasis: *"The goal is not to trick each other, but to learn how fake news works and how to protect ourselves from it."*
2. Brainstorming (3 min): teacher asks guiding questions:
   - Is every piece of news online true? How to distinguish truth from falsehood?
   - What makes us click "Share" without checking content? (e.g. emotions, sensational headline, image, peer pressure).
   - Can a false news story change someone's behavior or opinion? (e.g. election decisions, opinions about others, fear of vaccinations).
   - Have you ever forwarded something and later found out it wasn't true?
3. Summary of introduction:
   - The simulation will show how easily false information spreads online and how a responsible recipient can stop it.
   - Students will learn how fake news works in practice, what emotions drive it, and how professional fact-checkers verify information.

2. Educational Game "Unmask the Fake News!"

Game objective:
To show students how disinformation works online, how quickly false news spreads, and how it can be verified using simple tools.
The game develops critical thinking, source analysis, and conscious response to online content.

1. Division into teams

- The class splits into 3–4 fact-checker teams (3–5 students each).
- Each team acts like a fact-checking newsroom that must verify a set of news and prepare a report.

2. Materials for each group
Each team receives:

1. A set of 6 news cards – each card contains:
   o Headline.
   o Excerpt from article or post.
   o Thumbnail photo or screenshot.
      The set includes:
   o **3 true news items** – confirmed by reliable sources.
   o **3 false news items** – manipulated, clickbait, rumor-based.
   o Topics varied: politics, health, environment, sports, celebrities.
2. Fact-checker's tool card – a set of simple guiding questions.
3. News analysis table – to be filled in during the game.
4. Verification materials:
   o Internet/tablet access, or
   o Printouts with article excerpts, search results, screenshots from official institutions and fact-checking portals.

Sample set of news cards

1. True News – Health
Headline:
WHO publishes report on benefits of physical activity for children
Content:
"According to the latest World Health Organization report, 60 minutes of moderate daily

physical activity improves heart health, concentration, and well-being of school-aged children. The report was published on June 3, 2024 on the WHO website."

Thumbnail photo:
Children running on a school playground.
Context (for teacher): Source: Official WHO website – report from June 2024.

2. True News – Environment
Headline:
Poland increased area of national parks by 5%
Content:
"The Ministry of Climate and Environment announced that in 2024 the boundaries of three national parks were expanded by a total of 8,000 hectares. The goal is to protect rare plant and animal species and increase green areas accessible to tourists."
Thumbnail photo:
Mountain panorama with forest.
Context: Source: Ministry of Climate, press release May 14, 2024.

3. True News – Technology
Headline:
New app for the blind wins European Innovation Award
Content:
"The SeeIt app, created by a Polish start-up, uses artificial intelligence to describe the user's surroundings in real time. The project received the European Innovation Award 2024."
Thumbnail photo:
Blind person holding a smartphone.
Context: Source: European Commission Innovation Portal, April 20, 2024.

4. False News – Politics
Headline:
EU bans home vegetable gardens from 2025
Content:
"New EU regulations allegedly ban growing vegetables and fruit in private gardens. Authorities plan fines up to €5000. Information published by an anonymous blogger on WolnaPrawda.pl."
Thumbnail photo:
Photo of tomatoes in pots.
Context: Fake news – no such EU regulation; often used in disinformation campaigns.

5. False News – Health
Headline:
"Shock! Tap water in Poland contains substance causing hair loss!"

Content:
"According to an anonymous 'expert,' tap water in big cities contains chemicals that cause baldness. No official reports – information comes from a Facebook post shared over 10,000 times."
Thumbnail photo:
Photo of empty tap.
Context: Fake news – not confirmed by Sanepid or any official research.

6. False News – Celebrities
Headline:
Famous actress kidnapped a fan's dog after a fan meeting
Content:
"A witness claims that a famous actress took a fan's dog after a movie premiere in Warsaw. Article published on Plotki24, without witness name or photo proof."
Thumbnail photo:
Photo of actress waving to a crowd.
Context: Fake news – story invented for clickbait, no evidence, denied by actress's agent.

Fact-checker's tool card

Guiding questions (for each news):

1. Who is the author? Signed person or anonymous post?
2. Are sources provided? Links to known portals or unknown sites?
3. Is the photo/video real? Can it be found in other media or reverse image search?
4. Is the content based on facts or emotions? Does it contain words: "shock!", "disaster!", "secret info"?
5. Do other portals confirm it?
6. Is the language suspicious? Typos, lack of specifics, dramatic tone?

News analysis table

News content	Suspicious? (YES/NO)	Warning signals	What emotions does it evoke?	How to check?
"EU bans home gardens"	YES	No source, sensational headline, no data	Fear, anger	Check EU websites

Project cofunded by the European Union

News content	Suspicious? (YES/NO)	Warning signals	What emotions does it evoke?	How to check?
"New WHO study on vaccines"	NO	Official WHO source, link to report	Calm, curiosity	Look at WHO site
"Celebrity X kidnapped fan's dog"	YES	Gossip, photo without context, anonymous witness	Outrage, curiosity	Check news portals

5. Game

Course

Stage 1 – News Analysis (10 min)

- Students read all 6 news items.
- Sort into:
  - probably true,
  - suspicious – needs checking.
- Fill in table with warning signals and emotions.

Stage 2 – Verification (10 min)

- Check suspicious news:
  - online, or
  - in prepared printouts.
- Look for confirmation or denial.
- Record evidence and short justification.

Stage 3 – Presentation & Scoring (10 min)

- Each group presents:
    - which items they judged fake vs true,
    - warning signals noticed,
    - evidence found.
- **Scoring:**
    - Identifying fake news – 0–3 pts.
    - Quality of arguments/evidence – 0–3 pts.
    - Reaction proposal – 0–2 pts.
    - Presentation clarity – 0–2 pts.

6. Ending & Reflection

- Teacher summarizes game, announces winner "Newsroom of the Month," discusses conclusions.
- Students finish sentences:
    - "Today I learned that fake news…"
    - "The best method to unmask fake news is…"
    - "In the future, before I share, I will…"

Final list: "5 Steps to Unmask a Fake News":

1. Check source and author.
2. Look for confirmation in other media.
3. Verify photos/videos with reverse search.
4. Analyze emotions – is someone manipulating me?
5. Don't share if uncertain.

6. Glossary

Term	Definition
Fake news	False or manipulated news, often appearing as a real article/post, aimed to mislead or provoke emotions.
Disinformation	Deliberate spreading of false/misleading content to manipulate public opinion, cause chaos, or gain advantage.
Fact-checking	Process of verifying information accuracy in reliable sources, reports, databases, fact-checking portals.
Information source	Author of news or medium where content originated – journalist, portal, institution, anonymous user.
Warning signals	Features suggesting fake news: no author, sensational headline, anonymous sources, no evidence, photos out of context.

Term	Definition
Manipulation	Techniques influencing recipients via emotional language, omission of facts, false links, or repetition of untrue info.
Information bubble	Situation where user sees only content matching own views/interests, limiting exposure to other opinions.
Digital echo	Phenomenon of repeating the same news in many places online, making it look true.
Source verification	Checking who authored news, whether evidence given, whether other reliable portals confirm it.
Fact-checking portal	Website run by experts verifying information, e.g. Demagog.org.pl, EUvsDisinfo.eu, Manipulátoři.cz.

7. Teacher's Methodological Guide

1. **Examples & Preparation of Materials**

- Selection rules:
  - o Use fictional news inspired by real cases, but avoid references to current/local political disputes.
  - o Include varied topics: health, environment, technology, sports, showbiz – to show fake news can cover anything.
  - o Screenshots styled like social media posts make the exercise realistic.

2. **Materials for the Game**

- News cards (6–8 per group, varied).
- Analysis table (A3 or A4 worksheets).
- List of fact-checking portals (PL: Demagog.org.pl, Konkret24; CZ: Manipulátoři.cz, Demagog.cz; SK: Demagog.sk, Infosecurity.sk; EU: EUvsDisinfo.eu, EDMO.eu).
- Fact-checker's tool card – control questions.
- Optional: internet-enabled devices for actual verification.

3. **Moderating Game & Discussion**

- Ask opening questions:
  - o "What looks credible in this news, and what is doubtful?"
  - o "What emotions do you feel reading this?"
  - o "How could this headline be phrased more reliably?"
- Encourage reasoning – students must explain why news is true/false.
- Suggest fact-checking portals or multiple sources if uncertain.
- Avoid grading – goal is analysis practice, not competition.

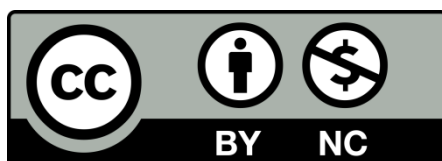4. **Creating Safe Atmosphere**

- Stress anyone can fall for fake news, even adults/professionals.
- Mistakes are natural, help us learn – focus on methods.
- Rules: no mocking, listen to arguments, respectful discussion.

5. **Extensions**

- Class/school tournament "Unmask the Fake News!" – students compete in pairs/teams spotting fakes.
- School bulletin "How Not to Get Fooled Online" – poster with verification rules and fact-checking portals.
- Homework mini-project: students pick one fake news found online (e.g. from fact-check site) and describe how it was debunked – present next class.

8. Sources

- **Demagog.org.pl** – largest Polish fact-checking portal. Publishes fake news analyses, verifies political statements, creates educational resources.
- **Konkret24 (TVN24)** – service verifying online content incl. health, politics, social events.
- **Manipulátoři.cz (Czechia)** – educational portal analyzing manipulation and disinformation examples in Czech internet.
- **Demagog.cz & Demagog.sk** – Czech/Slovak fact-checking sites, verifying public info and fake news in Central Europe.
- **Infosecurity.sk** – publishes reports on disinformation, propaganda, cyber threats.
- **EUvsDisinfo** – EU project monitoring fake news, esp. propaganda/information wars.
- **EDMO (European Digital Media Observatory)** – EU network of experts fighting disinformation, with educational materials, case analyses, teacher tools.
- **IFCN (International Fact-Checking Network)** – global network setting standards, certifying fact-checking portals.
- **UNESCO – Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers** – guide to teaching critical thinking & recognizing manipulation.
- **Council of Europe – Digital Citizenship Education** – resources on responsible internet use, verification, media skills.
- **Media Literacy Now (USA)** – examples of campaigns & exercises for resilience to fake news.
- **Google Fact Check Tools** – search tool for verified/debunked news.