ACTIVATING LESSON SCENARIO
developed as part of the project

'INNOVATIONS IN SCHOOL EDUCATION'

TOPIC
When Information Lies – How Do They Manipulate Our Emotions?
(The impact of emotional messages on our perception of information)

1. Lesson Objectives

The student:
• Understands what emotional manipulation in media messages is.
• Can identify signals that information was designed to evoke specific feelings.
• Knows the most common emotions used in fake news and propaganda (fear, anger, outrage, guilt, hope).
• Knows how emotions influence our decisions and memory.
• Learns ways to defend against emotional manipulation online and in the media.

2. Target Group

Primary school students

3. Teaching Methods

• Brainstorming
• Mini-lecture with examples
• Group work – analysis of emotional messages
• Guided discussion
• Individual reflection

4. Teaching Aids / Sources

• Board / projector / flipchart
• Examples of headlines, posts and memes with strong emotional tone (fictional or real, verified)
• Worksheets for analysis (who?, what emotions?, message goal?)
• Access to fact-checking portals (Demagog.org.pl, Demagog.cz, Demagog.sk, StopFake.org)
• Infographic: *"Emotion Wheel – How Do We React to Information?"*

5. Lesson Procedure (45 min)

1. Introduction – Can emotions lie? (5 min)

• **Brainstorming:** Students list emotions they most often feel when reading news online (e.g. fear, anger, joy, outrage, sense of injustice).

• **Guiding questions:**

- Is every message that evokes strong emotions true?
- Why do emotions make us share information faster?
- Have you ever believed something just because it was "shocking" or "scary"?

Factual information:
Emotions are a natural reaction of our brain to stimuli from the environment. In the world of online information, emotions most often decide whether something will interest us, whether we remember it, believe it, or even share it further.
However, an emotional message is not always true. Fake news and propaganda creators know very well that emotions act faster than logic – and they use this to achieve their goals.

1. How do emotions influence information reception?

• **Narrow attention:** When we are frightened or outraged, we focus mainly on what caused the emotion, often ignoring the source or details of the message.
• **Speed up decisions:** Emotions make us react impulsively – click, share, comment – before checking facts.
• **Increase memorability:** Emotionally charged news stays in our memory longer than neutral information, even if it is false.
• **Weaken critical thinking:** Strong emotions make logical analysis and checking the reliability of content harder.

2. Why do fake news creators use emotions?

• **Emotions = greater reach:** Content evoking fear, outrage or anger spreads faster online – people share it more often to "warn others" or "express their opinion."
• **Easier to manipulate emotions than facts:** No need to provide evidence – it is enough to trigger an emotional reaction for someone to consider a message true.
• **Emotions distort perception of reality:** For example, if something terrifies us, it's harder to believe the threat is not real, even when a correction appears.

3. Examples of emotional manipulation mechanisms

• **Alarmist headlines:** "Urgent!", "Shocking discovery!", "See this before they remove it!" – arouse curiosity and a sense of danger.
• **Dramatic images and videos:** Photos of destruction, crying children, crowds in panic – even if taken out of context or from another event.
• **Personal stories:** Accounts of "victims" or "heroes" without confirmed facts, designed to evoke pity or anger.
• **Us vs. them divide:** Messages reinforcing hostility toward other groups ("they are taking something from us," "they are to blame for your problems").

4. Conclusion for students

Emotions themselves do not lie – they are signals from our brain that something is important to us. But the information that triggered them may be manipulated. Therefore:
• **Pause:** before reacting to something shocking or outrageous.
• **Ask:** "Who wants me to feel what I'm feeling, and why?"
• **Check the source:** Is the message from a credible, known outlet, or from an anonymous sender?
• **Don't share impulsively:** Strong emotions are a signal to make sure the content is true.

2. Mini-lecture: How Emotions Become a Tool for Manipulation (10 min)

Objective:
To show students that emotions are not only a natural human reaction but also a tool deliberately used by fake news creators to influence our thinking, decisions and actions.

1. Emotions most commonly used in disinformation

The teacher explains that emotions are the primary "fuel" of false news because they attract attention more effectively than plain facts.

• **Fear:** Messages about threats of war, disasters, health dangers (*"No one is telling you the truth – your city is in danger!"*).
• **Anger:** The feeling that we have been deceived, that authorities, companies or social groups are acting against us (*"The government is hiding the truth from citizens!"*).
• **Outrage:** Messages about injustice, harm, discrimination, which provoke strong emotional responses.
• **Sadness:** Stories about alleged tragedies, victims and suffering designed to elicit pity and guilt.
• **Hope:** False promises of quick solutions to problems (*"This cure works 100%, but doctors are hiding it from you"*).

Key message for students:
There is nothing wrong with emotions – they are natural. The problem begins when someone deliberately provokes them to manipulate us.

2. Mechanisms of emotional manipulation

The teacher shows that fake news creators use specific techniques to control people's reactions:

• **Sensational headlines and dramatic language:** Words like "shock!", "secret information", "you must see this" make a message seem urgent and important, even if it's false.
• **Exaggerating threats:** Presenting a single incident as a "national catastrophe" or "proof of a great conspiracy."
• **Use of images and videos:** Photos taken out of context or edited videos trigger emotions more easily than text alone.
• **Stories based on "witnesses" or "anonymous sources":** No evidence is provided, but the account is so shocking that audiences believe it before asking for facts.
• **Creating a "us vs. them" divide:** Messages that pit people against each other (e.g. residents of different countries, supporters of different views) provoke anger and hatred, making rational dialogue harder.
• **Repeating the same message in many places:** The more often we hear something, the more likely we are to believe it (repetition effect).

3. Effects of emotional fake news

• **Impulsive sharing:** Emotions act faster than reason – people share the message to "warn others" or "express outrage" before checking the source.

• **Reinforcing false beliefs:** Even when a correction later appears, the strong emotions tied to the first message remain in memory.
• **Increased social divisions:** Emotional fake news fuels conflicts, stirs hostility, and leads to arguments both online and in real life.
• **Difficulty in rational thinking:** Under the influence of fear or anger, it's harder to calmly analyse data, assess sources, and look for facts.
• **Avalanche effect:** False, emotional content can quickly spread to millions of people, influencing public opinion, elections and social decisions.

4. Summary of the mini-lecture for students

The teacher emphasises:
• Emotions themselves are not bad – they are a natural human reaction.
• The problem starts when someone uses emotions to control us, not to inform us.
• If a message provokes very strong emotions, it's a warning sign – stop, think, and check the source before believing or sharing it.

3. Group Exercise – "What Do They Want Me to Feel?" (15 min)

Purpose of the exercise
• To show students that media content is often constructed to steer our emotions rather than simply convey facts.
• To develop the ability to recognise emotional manipulation techniques and respond to them consciously.
• To teach first steps in information verification and critical thinking.

Exercise procedure – step by step

1. Division into groups: The class is divided into 4–5 teams of 3–5 people.

2. Distributing materials: Each group receives 3–4 short messages/headlines (on paper, in a presentation, or on the board).
• Headlines should be fictional but realistic – resembling real social media posts or news site headlines.

3. Task instructions:
• Read each headline in your group.
• Together answer the questions:

1. What emotions does this message evoke? (fear, anger, outrage, sadness, guilt, hope, sense of injustice, etc.)
2. Why might the author want you to feel this? (possible aim of manipulation – clicks, profit, gaining support, dividing people into groups, disinformation?)
3. What could you do to verify the truth of this information? (e.g. check a fact-checking portal, verify the source, look for confirmation in several independent media outlets, check the author of the photo/video).
   • Write your conclusions in a table: Headline – Emotion – Goal – How to check?

4. Work time: 8–10 minutes.

5. Presentation of conclusions: Each group presents one chosen example and discusses their observations (approx. 2–3 minutes).

Sample fictional, realistic headlines for groups

• *"Immigrants are taking jobs – the government does nothing!"* (fear, anger, fuelling social conflict)
• *"Experts warn: your city could be flooded within a month!"* (fear, anxiety, sensationalism)
• *"New miracle drug protects 100% against disease – authorities are hiding it from people!"* (hope, sense of injustice, distrust of institutions)
• *"Scandal! Famous politician had secret meetings with the mafia – photos leaked online!"* (anger, outrage, desire for revenge)
• *"Your child may be in danger! Read before it's too late!"* (fear, panic, urge for immediate action)
• *"You won't believe what's really happening in hospitals – doctors stay silent in fear for their lives!"* (fear, sense of betrayal, conspiracy theory)

Probing questions for the teacher (to use during discussion):
• Did any of the messages evoke emotions so strong that you'd want to share them? Why?
• Do emotions make it easier to believe such messages?
• What features of the headlines or images made you instantly feel fear or anger?
• How can you tell that content is trying to manipulate you rather than simply inform?
• Is every emotional message false? *(Answer: no, but emotions make fact-checking harder.)*

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Optional exercise extensions:
• **Emotion scale:** Each group marks on paper or a board how strong the emotions (on a scale of 1–5) the messages caused.
• **Creating counter-headlines:** Students try to rewrite the same headline in a neutral way, without emotional manipulation.
• **Fact or emotion?** – Students indicate which parts of the headline are factual (verifiable) and which are aimed only at evoking emotions.

4. Discussion: Do Emotions Help or Hinder in Assessing Information? (8 min)

Teaching objective
• Help students understand that emotions influence how we process information – sometimes helping us grasp a problem, but often making it harder to assess content objectively.
• Develop the ability to consciously recognise emotional manipulation in the media.
• Encourage reflection on personal reactions and habits online.

Discussion procedure

1. Short teacher introduction (1–2 min)
"Each of us feels emotions every day when reading news or using the internet. But does something moving us mean it's true? Let's think about it together."

2. Open questions for students (extended list):
• Does an emotional headline make us more likely to believe it? Why?

- Do emotions sometimes "switch off" logical thinking?
- Do you remember a time when you believed something just because it was shocking or scary?

• Which emotions most strongly drive people to share fake news?

- Fear of danger?
- Anger at injustice?
- Compassion for a victim?
- Can joy or humour (e.g. memes) also make us share false content?

• Can information be true but deliberately presented to cause anger or fear?

- Can emotions be a tool of manipulation even when the fact is true?
- Do media sometimes exaggerate headlines to increase clicks?

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• Can emotions sometimes help in understanding information?

- When might emotions be necessary, e.g. in reports about human tragedies, injustice?
- How to distinguish an emotional message that sensitises us to a problem from one that manipulates us?

• How can we protect ourselves from emotional manipulation online?

- What questions should we ask ourselves before believing or sharing an emotional message?
- Can checking sources or talking to others help?
- How to break the "emotion chain" on social media?

Optional discussion examples (to display or read aloud):
• Headline: *"Urgent! New disease spreading in your city – you are at risk!"* – true or false? What emotions does it evoke, why might we believe it?
• Social media post: *"They want to take away your rights – say STOP before it's too late!"* – fact or emotional manipulation?
• Photo of a crying child captioned: *"Victim of border incidents"* – later it turns out the photo is old or from another country. Did emotions mislead us?

Teacher's summary (2 min)
• Emotions themselves are not bad – they are signals that help us react to the world, care about others, make decisions.
• The problem starts when someone deliberately uses emotions to control us – to make us do or believe something before checking facts.
• Therefore, remember three steps:

1. **Pause** before believing news that moves you strongly.
2. **Ask** whether someone might be trying to scare, anger or move you deliberately to manipulate you.
3. **Check sources** – before sharing content, make sure it comes from a reliable place.

5. Summary and Reflection (7 min)

Teaching objective
• Consolidate knowledge about the impact of emotions on how we receive information.
• Make students aware that emotional manipulation is deliberate, not accidental.

• Strengthen self-control and critical thinking skills, especially before sharing messages further.

1. Individual work (3–4 min)

Each student completes the sentences:
• *"I understood that emotions in news can…"*
• *"We are most often manipulated when we feel…"*
• *"Before sharing news, I will check…"*
• *(optional) "Today I learned that it's easier to believe something that…"*
• *(optional) "One thing I will remember from this lesson is…"*

(Answers can be anonymous so students feel free to express their thoughts.)

2. Reflection gallery (3–4 min)

• Students stick their notes on a large sheet with the title:
"How Not to Be Manipulated by Emotional Fake News"
• The teacher groups entries into categories, e.g.:

- **Checking sources** (fact-checking portals, multiple media, official websites).
- **Emotional self-control** (wait before clicking "share"; avoid impulsive reactions).
- **Conversation and consultation** (ask others if they've seen the same message, whether it seems credible).
- **Separating facts from emotions** (are there proofs in the message, or only emotional words?).

3. Final discussion (2–3 min)

Probing questions:
• Can emotions sometimes help, and when do they hinder understanding information?
• How can you tell that someone is deliberately trying to scare, anger, or move you?
• What surprised you most about this topic today?
• What rule will you try to follow from now on in social media?

4. Teacher's summary

• Emphasise that emotions are natural and necessary but can be used to control us.
• Final tips for students:

1. **Pause** before believing something highly emotional.
2. **Check sources** before sharing content with others.
3. **Talk, don't act impulsively** – ask if others have seen the message and what they think about it.
4. **Separate facts from emotions** – strong words or dramatic images do not always mean truth.

• You can write a final conclusion on the board:
"A conscious information consumer is one who thinks twice before clicking 'share'."

Optional summary extensions:
• **Class poster:** Students create *"TOP 10 Rules for Defending Against Emotional Manipulation"* – as a poster to hang in the classroom or school notice board.
• **'Emotional Calm Test'** – the teacher shows one emotional headline and asks what each student would do today after this lesson (pause, check, don't share).
• **Homework:** Students find one headline or online post during the week that evokes strong emotions and write down questions that would help verify its truth.

6. Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Emotional manipulation	Deliberately using the audience's emotions to influence their decisions or beliefs.
Emotional headline	News title phrased to evoke strong emotions (fear, anger, outrage), often at the expense of truth.
Emotional clickbait	Exaggerated content intended to provoke emotions and get clicks, regardless of accuracy.
Emotional fake news	False or manipulated message whose main goal is to provoke emotions, not convey facts.
Emotion effect in perception	A phenomenon in which strong emotions weaken the ability to critically analyse information.
Emotional polarisation	Division of society into hostile camps, reinforced by emotional, often false, messages.

7. Teacher's Methodological Guide

1. Lesson preparation

• **Lesson objective:** Clearly state that the lesson is about mechanisms of emotional manipulation in the media, not about discussing real people or political disputes.
• **Choice of examples:** Use fictional headlines, posts, memes or historical/international materials that avoid triggering local political tensions.
• **Rules of work:** At the start of the lesson, set that:

- Everyone has the right to their own opinion.
- We evaluate the content and manipulation techniques, not the people who may appear in examples.
- We respect others' opinions, and we don't laugh at others' answers.

2. Teaching materials

• Prepare various content formats to show that emotional manipulation can take many forms:

- Online headlines and article titles.
- Short social media posts.
- Graphics, memes, emotion-provoking photos.
- Short (30–60 seconds) videos or screenshots from sensational recordings.

• Choose content that:

- Contains exaggerations, dramatic words, photos evoking strong reactions.
- Is easy to understand for the students' age group.
- Allows the question: *"What do they want me to feel? Why?"*

3. Conducting exercises

• **Group tasks:** Encourage cooperation and reasoning.

- Provide analysis tables so students can write their answers (emotions → possible author's goal → ways to verify information).
- In each group, appoint a person to present conclusions so everyone has a role.

• **Example exercises:**

- *"What do I feel when I read this?"* – analysing emotions triggered by a headline.
- *"Fact or emotion?"* – students mark parts of the message that are facts and those meant only to evoke emotions.

- *"Neutral headline"* – attempting to rewrite the same message without emotional manipulation.

4. Moderating discussion

• Encourage giving arguments, ask: *"Why do you think that?"*, *"What in this message makes you believe it?"*, *"Is this a fact or an emotional slogan?"*
• If conflicting opinions arise, guide the conversation toward analysing the manipulation technique, not judging the students or real events.
• You may use rating scales (e.g. 1–5: how strong are the emotions this headline evokes?) – this facilitates discussion and engages everyone.

5. Ensuring emotional safety

• Establish the rule: *"We criticise content, not people."*
• If some content triggers strong emotions in class (e.g. fear, anger), pause the exercise, discuss students' feelings, and remind them that emotions are normal but can be used for manipulation.
• Avoid overly graphic examples (e.g. violent photos) – emotional content in wording alone is enough.
• Be prepared for varied reactions – some messages may touch on sensitive topics (health, safety, family situations).

6. Educational goal of the lesson

• Show that emotions are natural but can be deliberately controlled in media communication.
• Develop in students the habit of pausing, asking questions, and checking sources before believing and sharing emotional messages.
• Strengthen the skill of separating facts from emotional slogans that may lead to rash decisions, conflicts, and disinformation.

7. Possible lesson extensions

• **Class poster:** *"10 Rules for Defending Against Emotional Manipulation Online"* – created together as a summary of the lesson.
• **Analysis of real examples:** Using safe, international cases from EUvsDisinfo, Demagog.org.pl, Manipulátoři.cz or StopFake.org.

• **Debate:** *"Are emotional messages needed in the media?"* – students prepare arguments for and against.
• **Homework:** Finding during the week one headline or post that evokes emotions and analysing whether it manipulates or simply informs.

8. Scientific and Educational Sources *(international, EU, Czech, Slovak, Ukrainian)*

• **EDMO – European Digital Media Observatory**
https://edmo.eu
– Research on the impact of emotions on the spread of disinformation, educational reports.

• **EUvsDisinfo – European External Action Service**
https://euvsdisinfo.eu
– Analyses of emotional disinformation campaigns in the EU, examples of using fear and anger in fake news.

• **UNESCO – "Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers"**
https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000192971
– Global perspective on the impact of emotions on information reception, education in critical thinking.

• **StopFake.org (Ukraine)**
https://www.stopfake.org/en/news/
– Examples of emotional fake news, analyses of mechanisms causing fear and panic.

• **Demagog.org.pl (Poland)**
https://demagog.org.pl
– Information verification, reports on the use of emotions in fake news and social campaigns.

• **Manipulátoři.cz (Czech Republic)**
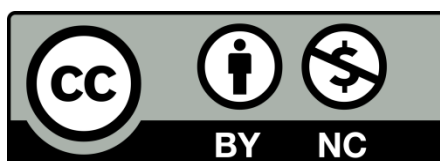https://manipulatori.cz
– Analyses of emotionally charged fake news in the Czech information space.

• **Demagog.cz / Demagog.sk (Czech Republic / Slovakia)**
https://demagog.cz / https://demagog.sk
– Examples of political and social news that use emotions to manipulate public opinion.