Charlotte Taught X-Word Grammar in Albany

by Tamara Kirson

On Friday morning at the Albany conference, a sizable group of interested educators came to meet Charlotte (the fictional spider heroine from E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web*), and learn about X-Word Grammar. Charlotte had wisely recruited Tamara Kirson, who teaches this pedagogical grammar to students in an intensive English program at The New School in Manhattan, to be her assistant.

Those present learned that Charlotte is a beautiful creature who lives in a barn and knows the secrets of life. One of the secrets she knows is about the x-words and making yes/no questions. She trusted everyone present with this secret, especially about what is hidden.

The educators discovered that, in fact, they knew all the x-words; you'll know them too. Here they are, including the ones that are hidden:

The Twenty X-Words

- Have Family have, has, had
- Do Family   do, does, did
- Be Family   am, is, are, was, were
- Pairs   can, could
                  shall, should
                  will, would
- Ms   must, might, may

Only three x-words are hidden. All the others are visible.

V/XO (do)—simple present   Charlotte and her animal friends live in a barn.
                                    Do Charlotte and her animal friends live in a barn?

V/XS (does)—simple present   Charlotte loves Wilbur.
                                    Does Charlotte love Wilbur?

V/XD (did)—simple past   Charlotte spun words about Wilbur on her web to save his life.
                            Did Charlotte spin words about Wilbur on her web to save his life?

As Charlotte explained, x-words are always used to make yes/no questions. Just move the x-word in front of the subject to make a question.

Participants at the workshop joined together to demonstrate a visual and kinesthetic approach to teach the logic behind X-Word Grammar. They were given cards with word chunks (subjects, x-words, main verbs, objects, and punctuation) and collaborated to form statements and convert those statements to yes-no questions. Everyone was quite successful!

Charlotte, therefore, thought them ready to move on to the next concept, forming negatives with x-words. She likes to think positively, but she understands the need for the word "not." (She recognizes that Templeton, the rat, is not very thoughtful.) Generally, though, she thinks that animals are good. She is not always sure about people—she thinks that sometimes people do not understand the value of animals. But she knows that they will listen to words!

Charlotte explained that there is one rule to make a negative with "not" or "n't." Attach the "not" or the contraction "n't" to the x-word. They are always linked arm in arm.

Here are two examples:
- Wilbur would not be alive without her.
- Charlotte can't imagine a world without her web.

While Charlotte is rather modest, she's willing to use the second example to ensure that you understand how negatives are formed.

Ultimately, Charlotte made friends with everyone in the room. She recognized that she had only begun to teach the pedagogy of X-Word Grammar, but she hopes that she whet everyone's appetite to learn more.

Workshop participants signed up to be a part of Charlotte's X-Word world and receive information about future trainings she is conducting. Even if you did sign the roster, please send her another email, as she is a precise spider and wants to be doubly sure she knows who's in her web now!

To explore more on your own about X-Word Grammar, go to this exclusive Wiki: xwordgrammar@pbworks.com

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