

# Teaching Old Buildings New Tricks



## Core Requirements

### SOCIAL STUDIES

6040-0102

### LANGUAGE ARTS

4040-0101

4040-0502

## Objectives

Students will:

- ✗ Discover that historic buildings can be adapted for new uses.
- ✗ Identify the benefits of adaptive use.
- ✗ Apply the concept of adaptive use to the story *The Little House*.

## Background

Architects and preservationists call finding a new use for an historic building “adaptive use.” Due to changes in the surrounding neighborhood, technology, or the economy, historic buildings can’t always be used in the same way as when they were first built. Fortunately, historic buildings are highly adaptable. They are usually well-built and can be upgraded to meet current structural and mechanical codes at a reasonable cost. Moreover, historic buildings tend to have attractive architectural features which many modern buildings lack, such as high ceilings, large windows, and beautiful woodwork.

Adaptive use is beneficial on a number of levels. Business owners often find it is less expensive to rehabilitate an existing building rather than construct a new one. Historic buildings also serve as a draw for customers and provide appealing work environments for employees. Adaptive use benefits communities by preserving their heritage. Reusing old buildings also benefits the local economy by putting vacant buildings back on tax roles and stimulating economic revitalization in depressed neighborhoods. Finally, adaptive use benefits the environment by reducing the resources expended on constructing new buildings and the stress on our landfills. Up to 30 percent of the material in landfills is from demolished buildings!

One of the earliest, large-scale adaptive use projects took place in Salt Lake City. In 1969, a group of developers led by Wally Wright, Jr. purchased the city’s 1904 trolley barns. Following the example of Ghiradelli Square, a former chocolate factory in San Francisco, they converted the barns into a “festival marketplace”—Trolley Square. The large, open spaces inside the barns were easily adapted to the needs of stores, theaters, and restaurants. The project received national attention when it was completed. The New York Times wrote, “Salt Lake City’s Trolley Square is now thronged with shoppers and sightseers, moviegoers and diners. A privately financed, \$7 million redevelopment project has given a new lift to an aging neighborhood, and may set a pattern for similar refurbishing of trolley barns or bus garages elsewhere in the nation.”

## Materials

- ✓ Virginia Lee Burton, *The Little House*.  
(This picture book should be available in your school or local library)
- 32 Utah State Historical Society Library Stacks in the Kearns Mansion photo  
—make overhead—
- 33 Trolley Barns photo  
—make overhead—
- 34 Trolley Square photo  
—make overhead—
- ✓ Drawing paper and crayons or markers  
—for each student—

Since the 1970s, adaptive use has become an important strategy for preserving historic buildings. In Utah buildings ranging from small cottages to large warehouses have been put to a variety of creative new uses, including restaurants, office space, bed and breakfasts, schools, libraries, stores, artists' studios, condominiums/apartments, galleries, and community centers. For more information on adaptive use projects in your area, contact Utah Heritage Foundation at (801) 533-0858.

## Student Instruction



Read *The Little House* with students. Ask students: *In what ways did the neighborhood surrounding the Little House change? Could the Little House still be used as a house after its neighborhood changed? Why or why not? What was the solution to the Little House's problem in the story?*



Tell students that, unlike the Little House, most historic buildings aren't moved when they can no longer serve the purpose for which they were built. Just like people, animals, and plants, buildings can adapt to new situations. As a class, brainstorm examples of how people, animals, or plants adapt to new situations.



Tell students that the Kearns Mansion was built as a house and is used as a house now. But for 21 years, from 1957-1978, it was not a house. Ask students if they remember how the mansion was used in this period. Show Clue 32, *Utah State Historical Society Library Stacks in the Kearns Mansion* photo, to help them remember. Explain that the Utah State Historical Society was located in the Kearns Mansion. The historical society took out the bowling alley and put its library stacks in the basement. Its offices were on the second floor where the bedrooms are. The ballroom on the third floor was used for history and art exhibits.



Show Clue 33, *Trolley Barns* photo. Explain that this building was a trolley barn in Salt Lake City. Have students guess how the building is being used now. Offer some hints. Show Clue 34, *Trolley Square* photo. Share background information on the adaptive use of the trolley barns. Ask students: *What things do you think the developers had to do to make the trolley barns into Trolley Square?*



Ask students: *In what ways do you think the adaptive use of the trolley barns benefitted Salt Lake City? Can you think of any historic buildings in your neighborhood, town, or city that have new uses? How have they benefitted your community?*

## Student Activity/Product



Ask students to apply the idea of adaptive use to the Little House. Brainstorm adaptive uses for the Little House so that the house *benefits the community* and *does not need to be moved*. Write responses on the board.



Each student selects the idea they think is best and draws the Little House with its new identity. Students should write a caption explaining how their adaptive use of the Little House benefits the community.

## Resources

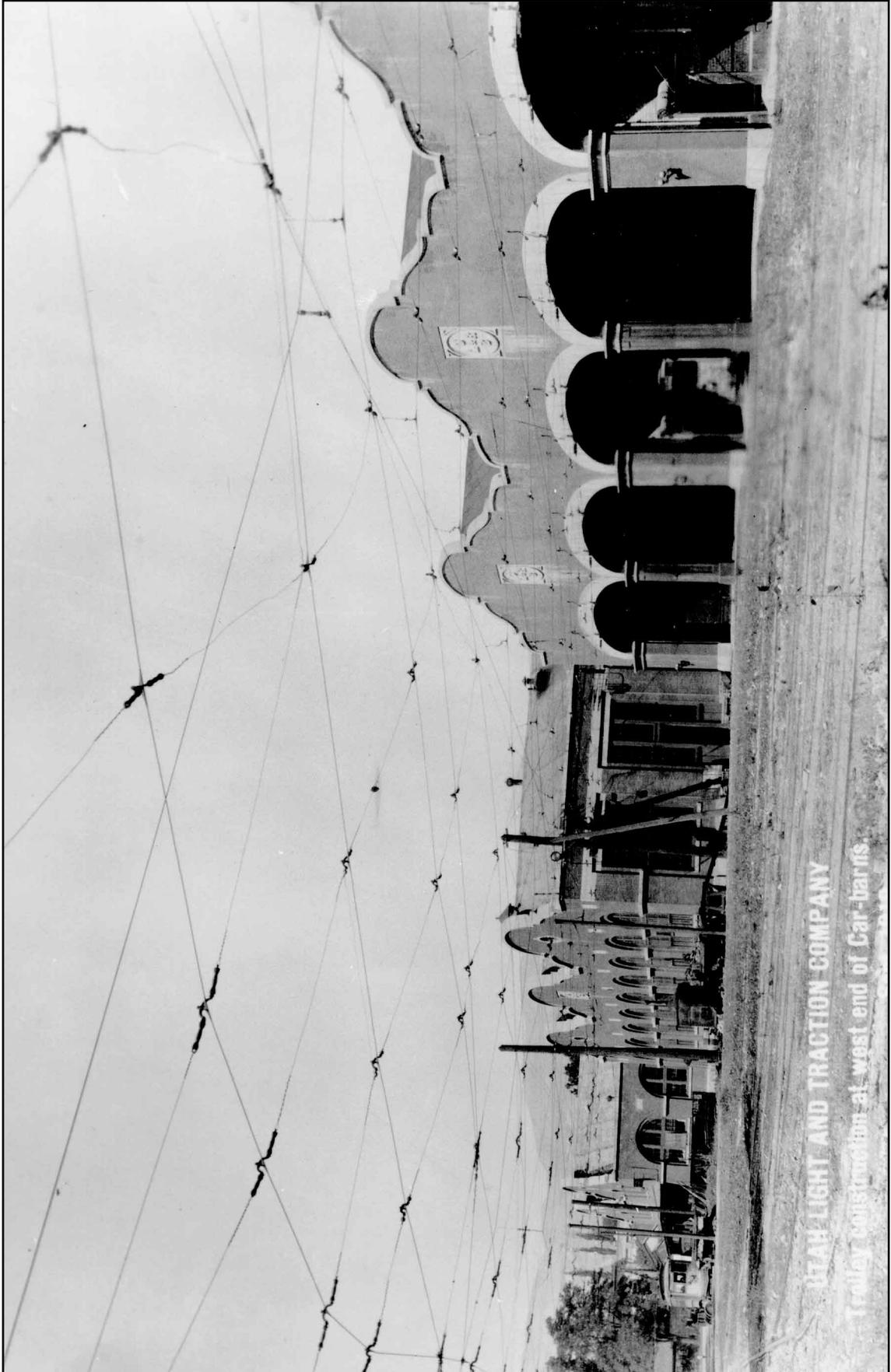
Burton, Virginia Lee, 1942, *The Little House*. Houghton Mifflin, Boston, MA.

## Links

Lesson 14: *Who's Still Standing?* Post-Tour



# Trolley Barns



UTAH LIGHT AND TRACTION COMPANY  
Trolley construction at west end of Car-barns.



# Trolley Square



Photo courtesy of Trolley Square

