



LESSON PLAN

# Resurrecting a Home



RELATED FILM

**Minka**

BY DAVINA PARDO



## Resurrecting a Home

### Key Idea

In our throwaway society, we often overlook the value of preserving things that may be old or run-down, even when they represent cultural practices that are vital to some people. Sometimes it takes a fresh view to appreciate the beauty and value embedded in labor-intensive, traditional craftsmanship.

### Background

The film chronicles the 1970s restoration of a 250-year-old Japanese farmhouse, or *minka*, by American journalist John Roderick and Japanese architect and art collector Yoshihiro Takishita. After purchasing the old building, the men relocated it and—with the help of traditional builders and artisans—turned it into the beautiful home they shared for over 40 years.

Meaning “people’s house” in Japanese, *minka* is a form of traditional Japanese house that was once common throughout Japan. Typically built of wood, paper, and thatch—without nails or concrete foundations—*minkas* were made with local materials and building techniques, and were perfectly suited to the local climate. Unfortunately, many of these masterpieces of traditional craftsmanship are being demolished because they do not fit a modern lifestyle (for example, they often have no plumbing or heat). The skills and materials needed to restore them are disappearing.

### Connections to National Standards

Common Core English Language Arts. SL.11-12.1.c. Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards. D2.Geo.4.9-12. Analyze relationships and interactions within and between human and physical systems to explain reciprocal influences that occur among them.



**Film:** 15 minutes

**Class:** 60 minutes

### SUBJECT AREAS

#### HIGH SCHOOL

- Art
- Environmental Science
- Japanese

#### COLLEGE

- Architecture
- Art
- Environmental Studies
- Film
- Japanese

### THEMES

- Value of old versus new
- Preservation of a culture
- Cycle of life
- Place-based architecture

### MATERIALS

- Online access to the film
- Equipment for showing film

### PREPARATION

- None



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Next Generation Science Standards. HS-LS2-7. Design, evaluate, and refine a solution for reducing the impacts of human activities on the environment and biodiversity.

### Lesson

#### SETTING THE STAGE

Point out that the United States is often described as a “disposable” society. Ask students: What do you think is meant by that? What do we lose or miss out on when we only value things that are new or modern?

#### ENGAGING WITH THE STORY

Explain that students will watch a film about two men who work to preserve an ancient Japanese farmhouse, or *minka*, for their living quarters. The film depicts the value of preserving something old and of honoring cultural traditions.

You might also point out that the film is a love story in both obvious and not so obvious ways, and invite students to notice that aspect of the film as well.

### Delving Deeper

After viewing the film, lead a discussion with such questions as:

- What emotions did the film evoke?
- What various techniques did the filmmaker use to convey this story (for example, the use of music, the incorporation of old photos, and the inclusion of imagery of nature)?
- Why do you think the filmmaker chose to tell this story?
- If you were asked to rename this film, what title would you give it?



### Reflecting and Projecting

Give students one of the following reflective writing prompts to demonstrate their understanding of the story. (Note for teachers: Just as quotes from a book or text are used to prove an analytical thought, students use the film to justify their reasoning.)

1. Think about your own neighborhood or community. Is there anything you see worth preserving? Are only physical structures part of your consideration or are other things worth preserving? How could they be preserved? (C3.D2.Geo.4.9-12)
2. Describe at least two ways the film depicts the cycle of life and death.
3. The relationship between John Roderick and Yoshihiro Takishita is not clearly defined in the film. How would you describe their relationship (or their relationship to their *minka*)? (CCSS.ELA.SL.11-12.1.c)
4. You have entered a photo contest called “Historic Preservation.” You are a highly skilled craftsman and use materials that others throw away, incorporating them into your practical ready-to-use pieces. Which of your pieces will you photograph for the contest? In the written part of the contest, how will you describe your piece? What are the materials? How did you transform them to create your “new” object? Why is there a need for your object? (NGSS.HS-LS2-7)

### Resources

Julia Rocchi, “[Six Practical Reasons to Save Old Buildings.](#)” National Trust for Historic Preservation, November 10, 2015.

John Roderick, *Minka: My Farmhouse in Japan* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007).