The Gift Part 1:

Summary:

Billy Buck is a strong, weathered man. He brushes the horses in the stable with deliberate grace, until he hears the triangle ring and goes to the house for breakfast. Because he is only a cow hand, he waits for the family to come down to breakfast first. The ringing of the triangle has just woken Jody up; he dresses immediately and goes down to breakfast. When his father and Billy come in, he can tell from the sound of their footsteps that they are wearing boots, which means they must be going somewhere. But Jody is afraid to ask his father where they are going, as his father is a "disciplinarian."

Before going to school, Jody takes a short walk around the grounds. The dogs Smasher and Doubletree Mutt follow. He notes the whitewashed house and the nearby bunkhouse, where Billy lives. He is standing near the cypress tree, underneath which is a big black kettle where pigs are scalded. He watches some buzzards circling at a distance, and hates them. On his way back to the house, he squashes a small watermelon, but is ashamed of himself for doing so.

After returning from school, Jody's mother scolds him for being careless with his chores. After completing them, he goes out to play with his rifle. His father does not yet allow Jody to have bullets for his rifle, but he enjoys aiming it at things. That night, his father and Billy return, and Jody's father instructs him to get to bed, as he has something special for him to do in the morning.

The next morning Jody is excited to see what his father wants. In the barn, his father and Billy show him a new red pony, and tell him it is his. Jody is choked with excitement and pride. Jody names the pony Gabilan, after the most fantastic things he can think of, the Gabilan Mountains. His father, a man who doesn't like to show emotion, is embarrassed and leaves the barn. After school that day, Jody brings a gang of six boys to look at his new pony. He is glad when they leave, so he can acquaint himself with the pony in private. As he grooms the pony, he almost forgets his chores, but his mother is not mad; in fact she is proud of the interest the boy takes in his horse.

**Analysis:**

In the first few pages of *The Gift,* Steinbeck introduces all the main characters that will populate the novel. Jody's father, Carl Tiflin, is a man who wants to raise his son right. He is stern, and doesn't like to show emotion. Billy Buck is more open, and he is the closest thing Jody has to a peer. Jody's mother is caring and quiet; she will not play a large role in any of the stories but the last. Even the two dogs who pop up as minor characters throughout the novel play a role in the first few pages.

Steinbeck also introduces the daily routine that dominates ranch life. Every morning, Jody's mother rings a triangle announcing breakfast, the same thing happens at supper. Dinner, the mid-day meal, is probably no different. Jody has certain chores (filling the woodbox, finding hidden eggs) that he continues to perform throughout the novel. Steinbeck's writing style is simple. He writes in short, easily understandable sentences and paragraphs. This combination of simple writing and matter-of-fact portrayal of everyday routines and events identify Steinbeck as a realist writer.

In accordance with his unadorned style, Steinbeck's symbolism and foreshadowing are fairly obvious. The buzzards, carrion eaters, foreshadow a death. The dark cypress tree, with its big black kettle where pigs are slaughtered, is associated with darkness, even evil, throughout the novel. These simple associations go a long way towards elegantly defining the world as Jody sees it. Being a child, his understanding is fairly straightforward: he hates things that remind of death; he loves those things that give him access to some sort of adventure.