The Red Pony Study Guide

The Red Pony by John Steinbeck

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

John Steinbeck's *The Red Pony*—which some critics believe represents one of Steinbeck's best works—is divided into four separate sections, unlike standard chapters. The sections are held together by common characters, location, and themes, and they follow a similar time line, but the continuation of story line is not as smooth as the transition between normal chapters of a novel. They all follow the trials of Jody Tiflin, however, as he progresses through the rites of passage from young boy to young man.

It is through the red pony, which Jody receives as a gift from his father, that he learns about death. This is a painful experience for a shy young boy who is so proud of his pony that he invites friends home from school just to look at the small horse. Likewise, it is through other animals that populate this book that Jody also learns about sex, old age, sickness, and birth. He is gently guided through his journey from boy to man with the help of a ranch hand named Billy Buck, who is reputed to know more about horses than any man around. However, even Billy cannot defy nature and must learn that he cannot make promises that he cannot keep. Through Billy and Jody's mother, Jody learns compassion and understanding. Jody's father is not as open to other people, but Steinbeck takes care not to depict Jody's father as a villain. Steinbeck treats all his characters fairly and fleshes out their personalities to their fullest extent possible within the confines of his stories.

Three of the sections of this novel were published separately before being collected in the book *The Red Pony*. The first two, "The Gift" and "The Great Mountains," were published in the *North American Review* in 1933, and the third, "The Promise," appeared in *Harper's* in 1937.

Overview

Steinbeck began The Red Pony fairly early in his career; his letters indicate he was working on a pony story in 1933, and the first two sections of the story sequence, "The Gift" and "The Great Mountains," were published in the North American Review in November and December of that year. The third section, "The Promise," did not appear in Harpers until 1937, and these three parts were published in a slim volume in 1937. The Leader of the People," the final section, was not added until the publication of his story collection The Long Valley in 1938. But manuscript and textual evidence suggests that the later sections were written some time before their publication, not very long after the first two stories. The four sections are connected by common characters, settings, and themes, forming a clearly unified story sequence, which was published separately as The Red Pony in 1945. A modestly successful movie version, for which Steinbeck wrote the screenplay, followed in 1949.

The Red Pony is among Steinbeck's finest works. This story sequence traces Jody's initiation into adult life with both realism and sensitivity, a balance that Steinbeck did not always achieve. The vision of characters caught up in the harsh world of nature is balanced by their deep human concerns and commitments.

Author Biography

John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California, on February 27, 1902, the son of John Ernst, a government employee, and Olive Hamilton Steinbeck, a schoolteacher. He grew up in the midst of an agricultural community on the east side of the coastal mountains, and when he turned seventeen, he began a six-year relationship with Stanford University, sporadically attending classes in literature and writing but never attaining a degree. In 1925, he gave up furthering his education and moved to New York City, where he worked for a time as a laborer on the construction project of Madison Square Gardens. He became discouraged about not finding a publisher for his writing, so one year later he returned to California.

He lived off and on at his parents' home, even after marrying Carol Henning, the first of his three wives. He continued to write, and in 1929 *Cup of Gold*, his first novel, was published. It was not until 1935 that Steinbeck enjoyed commercial success with his fourth novel *Tortilla Flat*, and from that point on his career as a writer was set. In the next sixteen years, he would write eleven novels, numerous short stories, three plays, and five movie scripts. His most notable works include *Of Mice and Men* (1937), which was made into a play in the same year and adapted for film many times; *The Red Pony* (1937), which was made into a movie in 1949 and adapted for television in 1973; *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), which was made into a movie in 1940 and 1991; *Cannery Row* (1945), which was adapted as a movie in 1984, and *East of Eden* (1952), which was adapted as a movie in 1954 and again in 1984.

During World War II, Steinbeck worked as a foreign correspondent for the *New York Herald Tribune*, first stationed in North Africa and then Italy. Later, during the Vietnam War, he also was a foreign correspondent, this time for *Newsday*.

Steinbeck's themes often revolved around what he saw as the evils of materialism, and his books were often his attempts to fight for human dignity and compassion in the wake of political and corporate corruption and rampant poverty. *The Grapes of Wrath*, probably his most famous work, was both widely read as well as banned and burned. Steinbeck spent two years living with farmers who had lost their lands in the Dust Bowl and migrated from Oklahoma to California in search of a better life, in order to gain firsthand experience in the hard luck of their lives. In 1940, he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his efforts.

Steinbeck would go on to win many more awards in his lifetime, including the Nobel Prize for literature in 1962. He also won an Academy Award nomination for best original story for his screenplay *Lifeboat*. After his success with *Grapes of Wrath*, however, critics maintained that Stein-beck had lost the passion in his writing, some even going so far as to state that he won the Nobel Prize mostly for his early works.

Steinbeck moved back to New York in his latter years, somewhat disappointed by the reaction of the citizens of his hometown of Salinas. This was a conservative group of people who found Steinbeck and his novels too liberal and thus too disruptive for their

tastes. He married Gwyndolyn Conger by whom he had two sons, one of whom was tragically addicted to codeine at the age of seven and would go on to write his own book, criticizing his father as a parent. In 1950, Steinbeck married Elaine Scott. On December 20, 1968, while in New York, he died of a heart attack.

About the Author

John Ernst Steinbeck was bom on February 27, 1902, in Salinas, California. His best books concern his idyllic youth and turbulent young adulthood in California.

Born just after the closing of the frontier, Steinbeck matured as an artist during the dark days of the Great Depression. Steinbeck often asserted, however, that he enjoyed a happy childhood. His father made enough money to indulge him in a small way, even to buy him a red pony, the germ of his most famous book for younger readers. His mother encouraged him to read and to write, providing him with the classics of English and American literature, such as the Arthurian tales of Sir Thomas Malory. A popular and successful student and athlete in high school, he was elected president of his senior class.

After graduation in 1919, Steinbeck enrolled at Stanford University. He soon suffered academic difficulties and dropped out of college several times to work on ranches in the Salinas Valley and to observe "real life." His interests were varied, but he settled on novelwriting as his ambition, despite his family's insistence that he prepare for a more ordinary career.

Leaving Stanford without a degree in 1925, Steinbeck moved to New York for several months, where he worked as a laborer, a newspaper reporter, and a free-lance writer. Disillusioned in each of these fruitless pursuits, Steinbeck returned to California, where he took a job as winter caretaker of a lodge at Lake Tahoe while finishing his first novel, Cup of Gold (1929). In 1930 he married Carol Henning and moved with her to Los Angeles and later to Pacific Grove, a seaside resort near Monterey, where they lived in his parents' summer house.

A friend, Edward F. Ricketts, a marine biologist trained at the University of Chicago, encouraged Steinbeck to treat his material more objectively. Under Ricketts's influence, Steinbeck modified his earlier commitment to satire, allegory, and romanticism and turned to realistic accounts of the Salinas Valley.

Steinbeck's next two novels were virtually ignored by the public and the critics. Steinbeck's short fiction, however, began to receive recognition; his story The Murder" was selected as an O. Henry Prize story in 1934.

Tortilla Flat, a tale of Monterey's Mexican quarter, established Steinbeck as a popular and critical success in 1935. The novel's sales provided Steinbeck with money to pay his debts, to travel to Mexico, and to continue writing seriously. His next novel, In Dubious Battle, established him as a serious literary artist and began the period of his greatest success, both critical and popular. This harshly realistic novel about a Communist-led workers' strike in California was influenced by the realistic impulse of American literature in the 1930s. Succeeding publications quickly confirmed this development in his fiction.

Before 1940 Steinbeck had published two shorter novels, The Red Pony and Of Mice and Men; a story collection, The Long Valley (1938); and his epic of the "Okie" migration to California, The Grapes of Wrath. His own stage adaptation of Of Mice and Men won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award in 1938, and The Grapes of Wrath received the Pulitzer Prize in 1940. Steinbeck had become one of the most popular and respected writers in the country, a spokesman for an entire culture.

In 1941 the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor changed the direction of American culture and of Steinbeck's literary development. Steinbeck's career stalled for many reasons. He abandoned the California subjects and realistic style of his finest novels, and despite serving for a few months as a front-line correspondent, he was unable to come to terms with a world at war. Personal upheavals paralleled literary ones.

Steinbeck divorced his first wife and married a young Hollywood actress; she probably influenced his decision to move from California to New York, where Steinbeck began to write with an eye on Broadway and Hollywood.

He tried several times to write his way back to the artistic success of his earlier years, but commercial success kept getting in the way. With East of Eden (1952), Steinbeck's major postwar novel, the author attempted another California epic to match the grandeur of The Grapes of Wrath. Although the book became a blockbuster best seller, it was an artistic and critical failure. Steinbeck himself seemed to recognize his own decline, and in his last years he virtually abandoned fiction for journalism.

Despite the popularity of nonfiction works such as Travels with Charley in Search of America and the receipt of awards such as the Nobel Prize for literature and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the older Steinbeck was only the shell of the great writer of the 1930s.

He died in New York City on December 20, 1968.

Plot Summary

The Gift

The story begins with a long description, focused on everyone who lives on the ranch getting up in the early morning. First to appear is Billy Buck, the only help on the ranch, who is presented as a very meticulous man, who rises from his bed in the bunkhouse. When he hears Mrs. Tiflin ringing the triangle, he walks slowly toward the house, not entering until he hears the sounds of Mr. Tiflin's boots on the kitchen floor. It would be impolite for him to sit down at the breakfast table before Mr. Tiflin, his boss.

Jody Tiflin, the young protagonist of the story, is the last one to get out of bed. He is portrayed as an obedient and somewhat shy son. Jody's father, Carl Tiflin, is described as stern. He is a man of few words. Jody does not bother to ask his father where he is going that morning, but because his father has boots on, Jody knows that his father and Billy will be riding their horses somewhere that day. Later, when he watches his father and Billy round up a bunch of old milk cows, Jody knows that they are driving the cattle to the butcher's.

Jody spends most of his day alone, playing with his dogs, wandering around the ranch. As he roams the land, he senses change in the air. He also notices two big black buzzards, a sure portent of death.

Mrs. Tiflin is always busy in the kitchen, cooking, cleaning, guiding Jody through his chores. When Jody's chores are finished, he heads outside with a rifle his father has given him, a rifle without bullets. Jody will have to wait two more years before he will be allowed to use live ammunition. "Nearly all of his father's presents were given with reservations which hampered their value somewhat," Jody thinks. When Carl and Billy return, Jody discovers that they have brought with them a red pony, a present for Jody.

Jody takes very special care of the red pony, whom he names Gabilan. The pony is somewhat wild, but it takes a liking to Jody, who slowly and gently teaches it to wear a bridle. One day, after a brief but cold rainstorm in which the pony gets available, and Mr. Tiflin cannot afford to feed anyone chilled, it develops an illness that Billy is unable to cure. The pony dies, leaving Jody devastated.

The Great Mountains

This section begins with Jody in a foul mood. He's looking for trouble and does not stop until he has killed a bird with his slingshot. He does not appear remorseful about the death and only hides the evidence because he does not want "older people" to find out what he has done. He knows they would not approve.

Jody stares at the mountain range in the distance and wonders who lives there. He asks his mother and father and Billy, but no one can tell him much about what exists in the far

ranges. As Jody makes up stories in his head about who might live there, he notices the figure of a man walking toward the ranch. It turns out to be an old man, who tells Jody that his name is Gitano. The man has come back to his home to die. Gitano used to live on the same property where the Tiflins now live. As a matter of fact, Gitano's family claim to this land goes far back into history.

Mrs. Tiflin is surprised by the appearance of this old man. She remembers the old adobe house that used to exist on the property, but she knows nothing of this man or his family. Soon Mr. Tiflin and Billy come to Mrs. Tiflin's rescue and tell the man that he cannot stay there. There is no work available, and Mr. Tiflin cannot afford to feed anyone else. He does, however, invite Gitano to stay for dinner, sleep overnight in the bunkhouse, and have breakfast with them in the morning. That is the best he can do. Gitano accepts.

Jody shows Gitano to the bunkhouse and eventually gains enough nerve to ask the old man if he came out of the mountains. The man answers in the negative. Jody pursues his line of questioning, and finally Gitano tells him that once he did go into the mountains but he cannot remember much about them except that it was quiet and nice up there.

Jody invites Gitano to walk with him to the barn to see the horses that his father owns. Gitano is taken by an old horse that Jody refers to as Easter. It is the first horse that his father ever owned. "He's thirty years old," Jody tells Gitano. "No good any more," Gitano replies. "Just eats and pretty soon dies."

Carl overhears this conversation and adds, "Old things ought to be put out of their misery," taunting the old man. Billy tries to soften the tone by adding, "They got a right to rest after they worked all their life. Maybe they just like to walk around." Carl continues to search for sore points in Gitano, and Jody recognizes his father's harshness.

Before going to bed, Jody sneaks into the bunkhouse and watches Gitano go through a bag of his belongings. Included in the bag is a long, old sword, something that Gitano's father gave to him. In the morning, Gitano does not appear for breakfast. When Jody searches through Gitano's things, everything is there except the sword. They all soon discover that the old horse Easter is also missing.

The Promise

Carl's father decides to give Jody another chance at having a pony. He makes arrangements for one of his mares to be mated. Jody must take the horse to a neighbor, who owns a stallion. Just before arriving at the neighbor's, the stallion sees Jody bringing the mare and breaks free as Jody is walking the mare up the road. Jody hides, as the stallion is very big and acting strangely. He watches the two horses and fears that the stallion will kill his mare. Jess Taylor, the owner of the stallion, tries to convince Jody to go away, but Jody insists on watching the mating.

Much later, Jody becomes impatient while waiting for signs that his mare has been impregnated. Billy warns him that it will take a long time before they will see any signs. Jody asks a lot of questions of what it will be like to watch the birthing, and Billy explains a lot of the details. After they talk, Jody asks, "Billy, you won't let anything happen to the colt, will you?" Billy knows that Jody blames him for the loss of the red pony and tries to assure Jody that everything will be all right, but he says he cannot promise anything.

A year passes, and Jody almost gives up hope. One morning, his mother shows Jody how to make a warm mash for the mare. This signals that the mare is showing signs of pregnancy. From then on, Jody is ever watchful of the mare as she goes through her changes, growing wider with every day. When the time comes, Jody stands at Billy's side, watching everything that he does.

Billy grows restless and more serious as the mare becomes more and more uncomfortable in her attempts to deliver. Finally, Billy inspects the mare internally and discovers that the colt is turned the wrong way for delivery. The mare will not be able to push the colt out of her without tearing up her insides.

Billy tells Jody to go outside, but Jody insists on staying and watching. Billy picks up a hammer and tells Jody to at least turn his head away. Jody then hears the smash of hammer against bone as Billy kills the mare by bringing the hammer down on her head. When the mare falls, Billy cuts her belly and pulls out the colt. Although Jody tries to feel excited and happy about the birth of the colt, his feelings are tainted with the image of Billy covered in blood and the body of the dead mare.

The Leader of the People

Mrs. Tiflin receives a letter from her father stating that he will be visiting her soon. When Carl finds out that his father-in-law is coming, he immediately begins complaining. When Mrs. Tiflin asks what it is about her father that irritates him so, Carl states that he talks too much. Mrs. Tiflin tells Carl that he talks a lot, too, but Carl says that the real problem with his father-in-law is that he only talks about one thing. At this point, Jody breaks into the conversation with "Indians and crossing the plains!" These are the two topics that Mrs. Tiflin's father continually refers to. He craves telling stories about how he led a caravan of people across the plains and how they had to deal with the Native-American populations that they encountered. Carl is tired of the stories because he has heard them so many times.

When Grandfather finally arrives, every topic that someone else brings up seems to remind him of a story from his past. Soon, he is lost, recounting his own history and his adventures, telling stories that they all know by heart. Carl is the most impatient and most rude, interrupting his father-in-law, telling him that he'd already heard that story. Jody, contrary to his father, encourages his grandfather to tell more stories.

In the morning, everyone sits down at the breakfast table and wonders where Grandfather is. Mrs. Tiflin assures them that Grandfather will be coming soon. It's just

that he is very particular about dressing himself in the morning. Carl begins to poke fun at his father-in-law. When Mrs. Tiflin criticizes Carl's insults toward her father, Carl gets angry with her. He raises his voice and complains about the stories, asking no one in particular why he has to listen to his father-in-law's stories over and over again. No one notices that Grandfather is standing at the doorway to the kitchen.

There is tension in the air. Carl tries to apologize, but in order to do so, he must lie. He tells his father-in-law that he was just trying to be funny. Grandfather does not really believe him. "An old man doesn't see things sometimes," he says. "Maybe you're right."

After breakfast, Grandfather seems to have lost all his energy. He tells Jody that maybe he will leave early. "I feel as though the crossing wasn't worth doing," he says, making a reference to the topic of all his stories. He confesses that it's not really the stories that are important but the way the telling of the stories makes him feel. He had hoped that other people in listening to the stories would feel just as he did. Grandfather had led many people out West. When they reached the ocean, they stopped. When Jody tries to cheer up his grandfather by saying that maybe one day he would lead people, Grandfather says, "There's no place to go." Then he adds, "There's a line of old men along the shore hating the ocean because it stopped them."

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The story begins at daybreak on the Tiflin ranch near Salinas, California. Billy Buck is a middle-aged ranch hand who works for the Tiflin family. He is a seasoned ranchman who is very good with horses. He rises with the sun and curries and brushes two saddle horses before breakfast. He goes to the ranch house when Ruth Tiflin rings the iron triangle to signal that breakfast is ready. He waits to go into the dining room because he is a cowhand and it is proper for a family member to go in first.

Ten-year-old Jody Tiflin is awakened by the triangle. Jody has blond hair and grey eyes, and his mouth "works" when he thinks. He dresses quickly in shirt and overalls, and hurries to the kitchen to wash before breakfast. It is late summer, so he wears no shoes. Everyone eats a hearty breakfast of eggs, bacon, and biscuits. Jody's father Carl comes in wearing boots; Jody looks under the table to be sure he's wearing boots even though he knows by the sound of his father's footsteps that he is. It is light now; Carl turns off the oil lamp over the table. Jody wishes he could ride along with his father and Billy, wherever they might be going that day. However, he does not ask any questions, for his father is a disciplinarian and Jody is obedient and shy.

Carl and Billy are going to drive six old cows to the butcher. Billy says he could do it alone, but Carl says he'll go along to keep Billy company. Mrs. Tiflin asks Carl when they'll be back. He says he isn't sure, because he has to "see some men in Salinas." After breakfast, Jody watches the men mount the horses and drive the cows out of the corral and over the hill.

When the men are gone, Jody walks around the property near the house with the dogs, Doubletree Mutt and Smasher. The dogs are excited to be with him; they run ahead, looking back occasionally to be sure he is following. They go through the chicken yard where quail are eating with the chickens. Jody continues through the vegetable patch; the new corn is over his head and the cow-pumpkins are small and green. He goes to the sagebrush line where there is a pipe outlet from a cold spring into a wooden tub; he has a drink. He turns and surveys the ranch, seeing the ranch house and the bunkhouse where Billy Buck lives. He sees the large black kettle under the cypress, where they slaughter and prepare pigs. The birds and squirrels make a great racket as he looks over the ranch buildings. Jody feels "an uncertainty in the air, a feeling of change and of loss and of the gain of new and unfamiliar things." He sees two buzzards over the hill and knows that something has died nearby. He hates the buzzards but knows they can't be hurt because they take away carrion.

Jody goes back down the hill toward the house. Back through the garden, he smashes a melon with his foot and feels bad about it. In the house, his mother inspects his dirty hands but doesn't make him wash because she knows he'll just get dirty again on the

way to school. As Jody begins the mile walk to school, his mother notices "that his mouth was working a good deal this morning."

On the way to school, Jody collects rocks and throws them at birds and rabbits. He meets two friends along the way and they walk together, acting silly. School has been open for only two weeks.

Coming home at four o'clock that afternoon, Jody immediately looks for the horses in the corral. They are not there, so he knows his father and Billy are still gone. He moves slowly toward his afternoon chores. His mother is mending socks on the porch and tells him there are doughnuts for him in the kitchen. She scolds him for stacking too little wood and finding too few eggs the day before and tells him to fill the wood-box full and to search in the grass for hidden eggs. Jody does his chores. When he feeds the chickens, the quail come to eat, too; his father is proud that they come and doesn't allow shooting near the house for fear they'll leave. After filling the wood-box, Jody takes his .22 rifle up to the cold spring. He aims it all over the place but does not fire because he has no ammunition. He won't be allowed cartridges until he is 12.

There is no supper until after dark, when Carl Tiflin and Billy Buck return. Jody smells brandy on their breaths and is glad because sometimes his father talks to him and tells stories about his own boyhood when he's been drinking brandy. However, after dinner his father sternly tells him to go to bed because he's going to need Jody in the morning. Jody is disappointed, but he is excited about getting to do something out of the ordinary the next day, whatever it might be. Later, from his bed, he hears his father tell his mother, "However,, Ruth, I didn't give much for him."

In the morning, Jody dresses even more quickly than usual and rushes down to breakfast. He notices that Carl and Billy are both wearing flat-heeled shoes. His father looks "stern and disciplinary" as he turns off the oil lamp, and Billy doesn't look at Jody at all. Carl tells Jody to accompany the men after breakfast, which makes Jody nervous; "he felt a kind of doom in the air." As he follows the men out of the house after breakfast, his mother calls to his father not to "let it keep him from school."

They walk past the cypress and the pig-killing equipment, through a stubble-field, and to the barn. Carl crosses to the single box stall and tells Jody to join him. Jody looks inside and sees a red pony colt. Its coat and mane are rough and tangled, and it has a wild look in its eyes. Carl tells Jody he must curry the pony and keep his stall clean or he will sell the pony off. Jody puts out his hand toward the pony's nose, and the pony bites his fingers. Jody is proud of the pony's spirit, and the men laugh "somewhat in relief." Carl leaves the barn to be alone; he is embarrassed. Billy stays and assures Jody that the pony is indeed his if he takes care of him and breaks him. Billy tells Jody that Carl got the pony at a sheriff's auction in Salinas. He shows Jody the saddle they got with the pony. Jody calls the pony Gabilan Mountains. Billy suggests just "Gabilan," which means hawk. He offers to make a hair rope for Jody if he will collect tail hair from Gabilan.

After school that day, Jody brings six boys home to see the pony. They are all very impressed and see Jody with new respect. They all want to ride the pony or at least lead him around, but Jody tells them the pony must be halter broken and trained first—that it will be a long time before anyone can ride him. The boys see the saddle and are equally impressed by it. Jody tells them his father might want him to help with the stock once Gabilan is saddle broken. After the boys leave, Jody goes to work currying and brushing the pony, making his coat shine. He forgets his chores until his mother comes to remind him. She is proud of his new devotion to the pony.

Now Jody is always awake before the triangle calls him to breakfast. He goes to the barn every morning before dawn to spend time with Gabilan. Some mornings Billy is there getting the saddle horses ready for work, and he tells Jody lots of things about horses. Jody listens carefully to Billy, because like everyone around, he knows Billy is a great horseman. Billy's own horse is nothing impressive to look at, but Billy wins first prizes at the rodeo because the horse is so well-trained.

Jody is proud of Gabilan's fierce spirit and his beautiful coat and muscles. He notices how Gabilan expresses himself with his ears.

Billy keeps his promise and helps Jody halter-break Gabilan and train him on the long halter. Gabilan learns well but retains his rebellious spirit, occasionally biting or kicking or stomping—but always looking like he is amused when he behaves badly. Carl complains that Gabilan is almost too good at the long halter work, that he is "almost a trick pony." However, he tells Jody that he should train him to the saddle soon. Jody is thrilled, for he has been practicing on the saddle on a sawhorse for some time. He dreams of riding his galloping horse out across the fields.

Jody begins saddle-breaking Gabilan, slowly getting the pony used to the saddle and the cinch. Billy helps him train Gabilan to the bridle. Jody is proud of the rambunctious way Gabilan resists bridle training. He dreams about when he'll first sit in the saddle on Gabilan, and he worries that he will disgrace himself by not getting up right away when Gabilan throws him off. Jody's father gives him an old pair of spurs, bent and cut to fit Jody. He tells Jody he can ride the pony by Thanksgiving, which is only three weeks away. Billy instructs Jody many times about how to get in the saddle and what to do when he gets thrown. Jody worries that it will start raining and make it more dangerous when he gets thrown. He practices mounting the saddle on a sawhorse. Every afternoon, he puts the saddle on Gabilan and leads him all over the ranch.

Winter weather comes before Thanksgiving, much to Jody's regret. Jody keeps Gabilan in the box stall, not wanting him to get wet. He takes the pony out every afternoon for exercise. Finally the sun comes out, and Jody tells Billy he'll leave Gabilan out in the corral that day while he's at school. Billy assures him it's not going to rain anymore, and that if it does, he will come take care of the horse; he also assures him that rain won't hurt a horse. However, Billy is wrong about the weather; it begins pouring after noon. After school, Jody rushes home in the rain to get Gabilan into the barn.

Jody rubs the pony down with a gunny sack, drying him as well as he can. The horse trembles and only nibbles at the hot mash Jody gives him. Billy and Carl come home when it is nearly dark. Jody is angry with Billy for being wrong about the rain, but Billy and Carl both tell Jody the rain won't hurt the horse. Carl complains that coddling causes weakness in animals as well as in men.

After dinner, Billy and Jody go to the barn to see Gabilan. Billy inspects the horse and gives him a rub-down. They tie a blanket around Gabilan. When Jody returns to the house, his mother assures him that Billy is "as good as any horse doctor in the country."

For the first time, Jody sleeps past the ringing of the breakfast triangle. He dresses fast and runs to the barn. Halfway there he hears Gabilan coughing. Billy is already there, rubbing Gabilan's legs. He assures Jody the pony has only caught a little cold, and that he'll soon be better. Billy assures Jody he will stay with the pony all day while Jody is at school. The next day is Saturday, and Jody will be able to be with him.

The pony is worse when Jody gets home. Billy shows him a lump under Gabilan's jaw; Billy says he will open it when it gets bigger, and then the horse will get better. Gabilan has "strangles." Jody helps Billy steam Gabilan with a medicinal nose bag. Jody wants to sleep in the barn with Gabilan, but Billy tells him that he will sleep in the stall that night and Jody can sleep with the horse the next night. Carl tells stories by the fire after dinner and becomes angry and hurt when Jody doesn't pay close attention; Jody cannot think about anything but Gabilan.

The next day, the pony is worse. Billy opens the lump under Gabilan's jaw and drains the pus. He tells Jody he's seen sicker horses get well, and that as long as he doesn't get pneumonia, they will pull him through. Jody stays with Gabilan all day. He helps Billy with another steam bag. He brings his bedding down to the barn. Despite his worry, Jody goes to sleep. He is awakened by crashing noises and discovers the barn door has blown open and the pony has gone out. He runs out with a lantern and finds Gabilan. The pony lets Jody lead him back to the barn. He is much sicker. Jody does not sleep any more that night.

In the morning, Billy comes in and tells Jody he must cut a hole in Gabilan's windpipe so the pony can breathe. Jody insists on staying. Billy cuts the hole and the pony breathes. It begins raining again. The triangle rings for breakfast. Jody goes to eat first, getting soaked on the way to the house. He eats and goes back to the barn, where Billy shows him how to keep the mucus out of the breathing hole. Carl comes and tells Jody to leave with him, but Billy angrily tells Carl to let Jody alone. Carl leaves.

Jody spends the morning taking care of Gabilan. At noon, the pony lies down on his side. Billy comes back and tells Jody to go take a nap so he can stay with the horse that night. Jody goes to the mossy tub by the spring outlet and looks around; the ranch buildings seem different now. Doubletree Mutt comes and sits with Jody. Jody returns to the barn and realizes the pony is dying. He dozes a little in the afternoon. His mother brings him a bowl of stew; he eats a little. The night is windy and cold. The pony's breathing is quieter. Jody wraps himself in a blanket and sleeps.

In the morning, Jody awakes to find the barn door open and the pony gone. He runs out and follows the pony's tracks. He sees a circle of buzzards flying lower and lower in the sky. He runs over the ridge. He sees the pony lying in a clearing; the buzzards are waiting for the pony to die. The pony is dead and the buzzards have begun eating when Jody runs up. He grabs one of the buzzards and kills it with his hands and a piece of sharp quartz. He is still beating the dead bird when Billy pulls him off and holds him to calm him. Carl wipes the blood from Jody's face and says, "Jody . . . the buzzard didn't kill the pony. Don't you know that?" Billy carries Jody home, angrily saying to Carl, "'Course he knows it. . . . Jesus Christ! man, can't you see how he'd feel about it?"

Chapter 1 Analysis

The title of Chapter 1 refers, of course, to the red pony Carl Tiflin gives his son Jody. Jody is ten years old and has learned that his father's presents are nearly always "given with reservations that hampered their value somewhat. It was good discipline." For instance, Jody has a rifle—but no ammunition. He knows that if his father catches him aiming the empty gun toward the house, he will have to wait even longer to be allowed to have cartridges for the gun. Although his father is away when Jody is out playing with the gun, he obeys, aiming the gun only away from the house.

The pony is an exception to the rule about the value of Carl's gifts to Jody. Of course Jody has to work to keep the pony. Carl says, "He needs a good currying . . . and if I ever hear of you not feeding him or leaving his stall dirty, I'll sell him off in a minute." However, the work Jody must do is actually part of the gift: Jody learns how to care for and train a horse (this is really a gift from Billy Buck, who is the only one who teaches Jody how to do these things). These are valuable skills in his time (early 1900s) and place (cattle ranch near Salinas). The deep trust that develops between Jody and Gabilan the pony is also a gift.

Truly, the pony has given Jody a sense of purpose. Jody gets up before dawn every morning to take care of Gabilan, and he gleans as much knowledge from experienced horseman Billy Buck as he can. Where before he has been just one of the boys at school, even looked down on because he was quiet and shy, now he feels the importance of being a horseman. The other boys look up to him and try to think of things they can offer Jody to cadge a ride on Gabilan when the time comes. Jody fantasizes about helping his father with the stock once Gabilan is saddle-trained; he practices "riding" in the saddle on a sawhorse, imagining himself riding his galloping horse across the fields, carrying his rifle. He is not just a farm boy anymore; he is an experienced and diligent horse owner. He is buoyed up by his private dreams for the future. However, his present-day life of discipline and hard work keeps him fearful of losing that fervently imagined future.

Carl has enormous power over Jody. Not only does he provide the pony, he tells Jody when he should begin saddle-training him and when he should be able to start riding—despite the fact that Billy Buck is the one providing all the know-how as Jody is training the pony. Jody lives by Carl's word on everything, and places enormous value on Billy

Buck's opinion of him, too. He practices mounting into the saddle on a sawhorse so that he won't grab the horn. Billy has told him to keep his hands away from the saddle, to grab on with his knees, and to keep getting back on until the horse won't throw him anymore. He practices again and again so that he will do it exactly as Billy has taught him. "He didn't like to think of what would happen if he did grab the horn. Perhaps his father and Billy Buck would never speak to him again, they would be so ashamed. The news would get about and his mother would be ashamed too. And in the school yard—it was too awful to contemplate." The extremity of Jody's fears reflects the enormous importance of the pony in his life and his overwhelming need to succeed in the grown-up world of riding and roping and ranching. He is living up to his father's expectations—caring for the pony well and keeping up with his chores—but lives in constant fear that he will make a mistake that will cause him to lose one of the things most precious to him: the pony, his father's respect, the possibility of ever being a rancher.

The cruel reality is that Jody has no control over the harsh reality of the time and place in which he lives. And he has not yet learned that people other than he can be fallible.

When the rains begin before Thanksgiving (despite Jody's constant wish that it stay dry until after he has saddle-broken Gabilan), Jody's diligence with the pony is even greater. He keeps the pony in the stall when he's at school, taking him out for exercise only when it isn't raining. When the sun finally comes out and he thinks of leaving Gabilan out for the day, Billy Buck assures him that it won't rain that day, and that even if it does, rain won't hurt a horse. This is the beginning of Billy Buck's newly-discovered fallibility: "Billy Buck wasn't wrong about many things. He couldn't be." Jody has grown up admiring Billy Buck as a tough, capable man who willingly shares his wisdom with Jody. Billy fails doubly because he doesn't come back to put the pony in the barn. However, Carl admonishes Jody for being angry with Billy, telling him horses aren't meant to be coddled like lap dogs. Carl hates weakness of any kind—as he must do, to a point, to survive and succeed in the tough world of ranching. As an adult, Carl understands the harshness and even cruelty of the world they live in; Jody is still living for his dreams, pinning all his hopes on Gabilan and on the powerful wisdom of Billy Buck.

Jody's disillusionment with Billy Buck quickly mounts as the pony gets sicker and sicker. Billy assures Jody the pony will get well; he promises to stay with the pony all day. "Billy had failed again, and he felt badly about it. He had to cure the pony now." However, he can't. When the pony develops strangles, Billy has to tell Jody the truth; "he couldn't be wrong three times." However, he tells Jody again, "I'll pull him out of it."

The pony's death is foreshadowed in the passage in which Jody sees a hawk (the meaning of Gabilan's name) in the evening sky. "He saw a hawk flying so high that it caught the sun on its breast and shone like a spark. Two blackbirds were driving him down the sky, glittering as they attacked their enemy. In the west, clouds were moving in to rain again." A spark is bright, but it burns out quickly; the blackbirds are milder echoes of the buzzards Jody saw earlier in this part of the story as well as precursors to the buzzards he will fight at the end of Chapter 1. And the clouds coming from the west signify gloom, especially since west is the direction of hope and beginning. This mention of a gloomy west is also a small foretaste of the events of Chapter 4.

Carl's storytelling three nights before the pony dies might be seen as his awkward attempt to distract Jody from the awful truth of the pony's situation. However, his hurt and angry reaction to Jody's lack of attention and laughter reveal that he may want just as much to distract himself from the cruelty of the pony's impending death. His gift to Jody is dying; his gruff assurance that rain won't hurt a horse is harshly crashing against the truth that by random chance, rain did hurt this horse.

Billy Buck is learning from his repeated failures to live up to his reassuring words. After he cuts open the lump of pus, he tells Jody, "Now he'll feel better. That yellow poison is what makes him sick." However, Jody sees how sick the horse is and challenges the statement, and Billy thinks hard before saying anything more. "He nearly tossed off a careless assurance, but he saved himself in time. 'Yes, he's pretty sick,' he said at last." However, he adds a note of hope: "I've seen worse ones get well."

However, the pony does not get well. Billy performs what amounts to an emergency tracheotomy so Gabilan can breathe, but it is clearly a temporary measure that only puts off the inevitable. The pony's escape into the heavy wind the night before shows that the pony himself knows he is dying. Jody does not tell Billy about it because he knows this, too. It is clear that Jody knows the pony is dying when he refuses to take the hot mash his mother makes for the pony. "He won't eat anything," he tells her before running back to the barn. Carl tries to get Jody to leave the pony, and Jody won't go. Carl asks again, more forcefully: "You better come on, out of this," and Billy tells him off. Carl walks away with his feelings "badly hurt." He has tried to protect Jody from the terrible experience of seeing the pony die, and Billy has brought him back to cruel reality: It is Jody's pony—he has loved and cared for it and trained it beautifully—and Jody is doing the right thing in sticking with the animal to the end.

Jody is growing up. When Billy tells him to go take a nap so he can stay awake with the pony that night, Jody goes to the mossy tub of spring water and surveys the ranch as he has so often before. However, it looks different now; it isn't just a place to romp and run around, but a place where important and terrible things are happening. Sitting there, Jody sees signs of insistent, continuing life: new weeds and thousands of quail tracks. Despite the cold wind and coming winter and the terrible, unavoidably impending death of the pony, life persists. The dog on which he had earlier taken out his anger comes to him quietly and accepts Jody's apologetic embrace—as well as the great service of the removal of a tick from the dog's neck. Jody kills the tick and washes his hands in the cold water.

When Jody returns to the pony to relieve Billy of the duty of keeping the breathing hole clear, he knows for certain that the pony will die. This time he does not wake up when the pony escapes from the barn in search of an unimpeded death in the open. In the morning, following the pony's tracks and seeing the buzzards coming down to feed, he is overcome by panic and rage, knowing he is losing the pony and feeling, too, that he is losing all that the pony represents.

The pony has gone to one of the little clearings where Jody had led him so many times during their halter and saddle training. The buzzards are patiently waiting. Jody runs,

but he is too late; the buzzards have begun eating the pony. Jody meets this gruesome, cruel reality with cruelty and savagery of his own. His killing of the buzzard recalls the passage early in the story: "The buzzards overlooked nothing. Jody hated them as all decent things hate them, but they could not be hurt because they made away with carrion." When Billy Buck and Carl Tiflin arrive on the scene, Billy pulls Jody away from the buzzard he is beating to pulp and holds him to comfort him. However, Carl, not understanding Jody's rage because he is too far removed from his own first knowledge of life's harsh violence, tries to explain to Jody that the buzzard didn't kill the pony. However, Billy understands how he has failed Jody and how he must help him now.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

It is a hot, midsummer afternoon, and Jody is bored. He throws rocks at swallows' nests, baits a rat trap to snap the dog's nose, and uses his slingshot to kill a bird. It is the first time he has actually killed a bird, though he has shot stones at many before. He cuts the bird into pieces and throws them into the brush, ashamed of what the adults might think.

Jody washes the bird's blood from his hands in the cold spring. He sits in the grass and gazes at the clouds and the mountains to the west. He has asked his father about the mountains before; they are a great mystery that he longs to understand. His father and the ranch hand Billy Buck have both told him there's nothing but dry, rough country in the mountains. Jody both yearns for and fears the mountains. He also gazes at the mountains to the east, the Gabilans. They are less threatening; people live in them.

As Jody surveys the land, he sees a man walking from the direction of Salinas, headed toward the house. Jody can tell it is an old man by the way he walks. The man carries a gunny sack. He is dark-skinned and lean, with white hair under his Stetson hat. Jody runs down and meets him at the gate. The old man tells him, "I am Gitano, and I have come back." Jody runs and gets his mother. Gitano tells Mrs. Tiflin the same thing, explaining that he was born on the rancho when the land was still part of Mexico. He says he will stay until he dies. Mrs. Tiflin sends Jody to get his father. Carl Tiflin and Billy Buck come back with Jody. Carl tells Gitano that he does not need another man on the ranch, especially one who can't do much work. He tells him he can stay that night and have breakfast the next day, but that he must leave after that.

Jody shows Gitano to the old bunkhouse. He asks Gitano if he came out of the big mountains; Gitano tells him he worked in the Salinas Valley. Jody keeps asking questions. Gitano tells him he once went into the big mountains with his father. Jody is excited and asks Gitano what it was like. Finally Gitano says that he thinks it was quiet and nice. However, he gets impatient with Jody's questions, and Jody gets shy again. He invites Gitano to go down to the barn and see the stock.

Jody and Gitano stand and watch five horses come down to the watering trough. After a long while, an old horse comes slowly over the hill and hobbles to the trough. Jody tells Gitano the horse is called Easter and is the first horse his father ever owned. Easter is 30 years old. Gitano says the horse is "No good any more . . .. Too old to work . . . Just eats and pretty soon dies." Carl and Billy walk over from the barn and hear Gitano. Carl says it's a shame not to shoot Easter, to save him a lot of old-age pains. He says old things should be "put out of their misery" rather than being allowed to live with the discomforts of aging. Billy defends the right of old things to rest after they've worked so many years. Carl talks about how beautiful and strong Easter was many years ago, how he won rodeo contests on Easter. However, he stops and says again, "However, he

ought to be shot now." Billy again defends the horse's right to rest. Carl makes a joke about putting Gitano out to pasture, if only ham and eggs grew on the hill.

Jody knows Carl is trying to hurt Gitano; he has lots of experience being hurt by Carl's words. He tells Gitano that his father was "only talking," and that he wasn't serious about shooting Easter. Gitano rubs the horse's neck. The triangle sounds for dinner.

At dinner, Carl asks Gitano whether he has relatives anywhere, and Gitano says he has a brother-in-law and some cousins in Monterey. Carl says he can go there, then; Gitano again says, "I was born here." Carl is afraid he might soften and let the old man stay. He repeats his joke about ham and eggs growing on the side-hills. Mrs. Tiflin says it's a shame Gitano can't stay, and Carl cuts her off.

After dinner, Carl, Billy, and Jody go into the living room; Gitano leaves without a word. Carl continues to defend his refusal to let Gitano stay, and Billy talks about how tough the old Mexican men are. Jody listens and thinks about how mysterious Gitano is, like the big mountains. While Carl is talking, Jody slips out and goes through the dark, noisy night to the old bunkhouse. He bursts in and finds Gitano polishing a beautiful rapier, which Gitano tries to conceal. Jody persists with questions until Gitano tells him he got the rapier from his father. Gitano lets him have one good look at it before telling Jody to go because he wants to go to bed. Jody knows he cannot tell anyone about the rapier. When Carl asks Jody where he's been, Jody tells him he was checking his new rat trap.

In the morning, Gitano does not appear for breakfast. Billy reports that he is not in the old bunkhouse, but his bag is still there. After breakfast, Jody goes to the bunkhouse and looks in Gitano's bag. There is nothing in it but a few extra pieces of clothing. Jody feels lonely. He goes back to the house and hears his father tell his mother that old Easter must be dead because he didn't appear with the other horses that morning.

In midmorning, the neighbor from the ridge ranch, Jess Taylor, rides down to the Tiflin ranch. He tells Carl he saw an old man riding Carl's old horse through the brush. He says the old man had something shiny in his hand. Carl checks his guns and discovers none missing. Jess tells Carl the old man was heading straight into the mountains. Carl laughs about Gitano stealing old Easter. Jess asks whether Carl wants to go after him, but Carl says Gitano has just saved him the trouble of dealing with the horse when it dies.

Jody goes off to gaze at the mountains and ponder all that has happened. He is full of longing and sorrow he cannot name.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter 2 opens in midsummer, so it is nearly a year later than the beginning of Chapter 1, and about eight or nine months after the death of Gabilan, which occurred just before Thanksgiving. With his great purpose in life gone, 11-year-old Jody is back to acting like a little boy: throwing rocks at swallows' nests, setting a rat trap to snap the dog's nose. His mother yells at him to "find something to do" (something useful, that is)

the way many mothers of 11-year-old boys do. Jody's version of "something [useful] to do" is to go cause mischief out of his mother's sight and earshot.

In Chapter 1, Jody has a rifle but no ammunition. Here he has a slingshot—and not just one he has rigged together with scraps, but one with "store-bought rubbers." Ammunition for a slingshot is ready to hand all over the place. Before this day, Jody has never hit a bird with the rocks he has flung from his slingshot. However, today he does. Immediately he feels "a little mean pain in his stomach" about killing the bird. However, instead of leaving it in the brush or burying it, he gives rein to his meanness, cutting the bird apart. Then he throws the pieces into the brush because he knows the adults in his life would be disappointed in him if they knew what he has done.

Jody goes to the wooden tub filled by the spring-pipe—clearly, his place to think and just be—and plays with the clouds by "pushing" them through the sky with his fingers. When he "pushes" a cloud over the ridge of the mountains, he sits up and gazes at the mountains again. They are "curious" and "secret" to Jody, for he longs to know what they are like and what is on the other side. The adults haven't been any help when he has asked about the mountains: His father sees going there as pointless because there isn't enough water to grow anything or keep stock; his mother just makes a joke; and Billy Buck agrees with Carl that there's nothing there but rocks. The big mountains to the west are fierce, scary, wonderful, and inviting all at once. The mountains on the east, the Gabilans, are not as scary because people can live in them. Battles against the Mexicans had been fought in the Gabilans.

As Jody gazes over his ranch home and sees how safe and inviting it looks compared to the sharp threatening hulk of the great mountains, he sees the old man coming over the hill. The description of the old man emphasizes his weathered appearance. He is lean, dressed in denim, dark skinned, with gnarled hands. His face is not wrinkled, but along with his hands, his white hair and stiff-legged walk give away his advanced age.

Gitano's announcement that he has "come back," and the Tiflins' confused replies, subtly point out the white people's ignorance of the place's full history and their arrogance about their claim to the land, which was originally owned by Mexicans. Gitano's calm announcement that he will stay there quietly challenges their ignorance and arrogance. Carl Tiflin offers Gitano hospitality—dinner, a bed for the night, breakfast—which seems small recompense for the destruction of Gitano's old lifestyle on the rancho by the Tiflins' ancestors. Indeed, as we learn in Chapter 4, Jody's parents are the first generation of white people to have spent most (or possibly all) of their lives on this land. It is quite possible Gitano and his family were driven off the land by Carl Tiflin's father and other relatives of the immediately previous generation.

Jody cannot stop thinking about the big mountains. Since he now knows Gitano once lived in the adobe dwellings to the west, he questions him about the mountains. However, Gitano only gives him a greater curiosity and yearning for the mysterious mountains when he admits having been there long ago with his father but will not say more than, "I think it was quiet—I think it was nice."

Perhaps in an attempt to repay Gitano for pestering him about the mountains, Jody invites him to come see the stock. Carl's response to Gitano's (perhaps sarcastic) comment about old Easter being useless is pointedly cruel. Just as Billy defended Jody's enraged murder of the buzzard at the end of Chapter 1, here he defends Easter's (and Gitano's) right to live out old age in peace and rest after a long life of hard work. Carl is absorbed in the practical—though not completely necessary—brutality of daily life in the harsh West. However, Billy, who witnesses this brutality and even perpetrates it sometimes when he has to, is able to strike a little balance with kindness and respect for good people and good horses alike. Later, after dinner, Billy defends "these old paisanos" in general, revealing the respect he feels for men who work so hard.

Carl's attitude when he is making the cruel comparison between old Easter and old Gitano recalls Jody's unnecessary killing and meaningless dismembering of the thrush—cruelty piled upon cruelty. Carl "hated his brutality toward old Gitano, and so he became brutal again." Briefly, when Carl reminisces about how strong and beautiful Easter was, there is a glimmer of joy that suggests the state of mind Jody might now be approaching had Gabilan not died—the joy of a boy and a champion horse. However, he stops himself, "for he hated softness." Carl has become habitually cruel, so that when he does slip into kindness or show concern, he stops himself or goes off alone to be angry or embarrassed. Billy Buck repeats his defense of Easter's right to rest, and Carl rebuts with the joke about ham and eggs growing on the hill. At dinner, when Carl invites Gitano to sit down and eat, he includes yet another reminder that Gitano cannot stay at the ranch: "You might as well get your belly full before you go on." Though Carl's jokes are mean and he keeps throwing in reminders that Gitano cannot stay, "the situation would not stop worrying" him—so he is not completely heartless. Once he learns that Gitano has relatives he can go to in Monterey, he considers the case closed and himself relieved of the responsibility of taking in Gitano. His comment to Billy about the Bank of Italy is a reminder that though they have plenty to eat, the Tiflins are not rich and may not be able to afford feeding another person when there isn't work for him to do.

After dinner, Carl repeats the justification for his sending Gitano away: "A brother-in-law and cousins right in Monterey. Why should I worry about him?" However, Jody, listening to his father and Billy, keeps thinking about the mystery of the mountains that is reflected in Gitano's dark eyes. He sees the depth in Gitano that is hinted at in his insistent "However, I was born here." Gitano is connected to this land in a way Jody yearns for but cannot understand; even Gitano's childhood home, now disintegrating from lack of care, is made out of the very earth.

The rapier is a wonderful secret, and Jody immediately understands that revealing its existence would violate Gitano's mysterious, proud, and stately bearing. It connects Gitano to his father in a way that Jody may yearn to connect with his own father, but hearkens to the kind of noble history Carl and Jody can never claim. The Mexican people were once—not so long ago—the rulers of this part of the country. And to Jody, who daydreams about galloping along as a hero on a marvelous horse, the rapier represents the possibility of such swashbuckling dreams coming true, despite the fact that they are rooted in the irretrievable past.

When Carl realizes that Gitano has stolen Easter and ridden off toward the mountains, he laughs it off as a favor—he won't have to dispose of the horse when it dies. Perhaps he is truly glad, for it is wrenching to see a beloved horse die, no matter how much meanness and bluster one might present to others. Easter was his first horse and provided him with triumphant moments when he was a boy. Now, 30 years later, picturing the comic sight of Gitano and old Easter ambling through the brush into oblivion, he gets off easily compared with Jody, who saw his own first horse through a terrible illness until it died, and witnessed the buzzards taking the first bites of its body immediately afterward.

Easter's name is the first obvious use of Christian symbolism. Easter is the Christian celebration of the resurrection from the dead of Jesus Christ. Old Easter, as good as dead as far as Carl is concerned, enables Gitano to pursue the meaningful death he seeks—if not there in the land he was born in, then off in the great mountains where it is "quiet" and "nice" and there are unspoken memories of going there with his father. In doing so, old Easter is resurrected in a way, from uselessness back to noble purpose. Gazing at the huge mountains, Jody thinks of Gitano and his rapier and the great mountains. He longs for something—perhaps the great mystery and noble life well-ended that Gitano and Easter represent—and it fills him with sorrow.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

It is springtime. Jody is walking home from school, imagining himself leading a phantom army. Then he is distracted from his make-believe by a horny toad, which he catches. He imagines himself stalking tigers and bears, carrying a rifle. He captures more toads, lizards, a snake, grasshoppers, and a newt, and puts them all in his lunch pail. He reaches their mailbox and becomes excited when he sees that the flag is up. There is a Montgomery Ward catalog and a copy of the Salinas Weekly Journal. He runs the rest of the way home and announces the arrival of the catalog to his mother. She tells him his father wants to see him before he starts his chores.

Jody is afraid he has done something wrong, though he doesn't know what it might be. He leaves the critter-filled lunch pail with his mother and goes to find his father by the barn. Carl is with Billy Buck; they are watching the horses and talking. Carl says Billy has told him Jody took good care of the pony before it died, and that Jody is good with horses. He asks Jody if he would work for another horse; Jody says he will. Carl tells him to take Nellie, the mare, up to Jess Taylor's ranch the next day to get her bred with Jess Taylor's stallion. Carl will put up the five-dollar fee and Jody will have to work it off with extra chores and by taking care of Nellie and of the colt when it comes.

Jody feels all his boyish foolishness is in the past. He works at his chores conscientiously, and apologizes to his mother for the lunch pail full of reptiles and bugs. He goes out to watch Nellie, and Billy Buck sees him. Billy tells him it will be almost a year before the colt is born.

The next day his father pins the five dollars in Jody's overalls pocket and sends him to Jess Taylor's with Nellie. It is about an hour's walk uphill. After he turns onto the narrow road leading to the ridge ranch, Nellie suddenly jerks back and almost gets away from him. He hears a scream, the splintering of wood, and a man yelling from around the barn. He tries to hold onto Nellie's halter rope but she runs at him. He drops the rope and gets into the brush. The stallion comes charging down the hill; he has broken his halter rope. The horses meet in a blur of violence turned to tenderness.

Jess Taylor appears on horseback and lifts Jody onto the horse by his overall straps. Jess tells Jody to go up to the house for a while, but Jody insists on staying, though he's afraid the stallion will hurt Nellie. Jess reassures him. Jody says the colt will be his and that he is going to raise it. Jess says that's good, that "Carl has good sense sometimes." When the horses have mated, Jess catches the stallion and Jody leads the mare. Jody hands over the five dollars and has two pieces of pie. Nellie lets him lead her home; she is so calm that he even rides her part of the way.

The rest of the spring and all summer, Jody works hard at whatever his father tells him to do. He goes to see Nellie every day but sees no change in her at all. Billy reassures

Jody that it takes a long time and answers all his questions about how it's going to be when Nellie has the colt. Jody says he hopes it's a stallion. Billy says Carl will never let Jody keep a stallion—that they'll have to geld it. However, Jody fantasizes about having a stallion. Billy tells Jody about possible problems with the birth; if the colt is turned around the wrong way, he might have to tear it apart to save the mare. Jody doesn't want to say anything, but he does: "Billy, you won't let anything happen to the colt, will you?" Billy knows Jody is thinking of the red pony, and that before it died Jody saw Billy as infallible. His feelings are hurt. He tells Jody he'll do everything he can, but he can't make any promises.

Jody keeps fantasizing about having a stallion to ride. He daydreams about helping the sheriff while riding "Black Demon," and about winning rodeo contests and being summoned by the President to catch a criminal in Washington. He goes to the cold spring to lie in the grass and dream of being a hero with his beautiful horse.

In September, Nellie finally begins to show signs of pregnancy. Mrs. Tiflin shows Jody how to mix warm mash for Nellie. Billy points out to Jody that Nellie has "turned nice" and just loves everything, unlike some mares that turn mean. Billy tells Jody that he is "half horse" himself because his father gave him mare's milk when he was a baby, after his mother died giving birth to him. Billy assures Jody that he'll make sure Jody gets a good colt.

Winter comes, and Nellie gets bigger and bigger. Jody worries all the way through January and spends most of his time in the box stall with Nellie. One day Carl goes to the barn with Jody and looks at Nellie; he tells Jody he has done a good job—the highest praise Carl knows how to give. Jody is very proud.

Jody becomes increasingly worried. The night of February 2, he wakes up crying, with his mother telling him to "wake up and start over again." He waits for his mother to go back to sleep, then puts his clothes on and slips out to see Nellie. Billy is sleeping in the barn and tells Jody to stop worrying and go back to bed—that he will call him as soon as it's time. Billy reminds Jody, "I told you I'd get you a good colt." On his way back into the house, Jody runs into a chair and wakes his father. Carl is torn between anger at being woken up and approval of Jody's determination to be there for Nellie. He tells Jody that Billy is the best horse man around, and to leave it to him. Jody bursts out, "However, the pony died—" and Carl tells him sternly not to blame that on Billy.

Jody does not sleep long before Billy comes to get him. He runs back to the barn with Billy and sees Nellie having spasms. Billy feels the colt inside Nellie and says it's turned the wrong way. He can't turn it. He picks up a hammer and tells Jody to go outside, but Jody won't go. He tells Jody to look away, and he strikes Nellie twice on the forehead. As soon as she falls, he cuts open her belly. The other horses in the barn react to the smell of entrails. Billy pulls out the colt in its placenta and tears the sac open with his teeth. He gets the sac off the colt and cuts the umbilical cord. He lays the colt at Jody's feet, telling Jody, "There's your colt. I promised. And there it is. I had to do it—had to." He tells Jody to go get hot water and a sponge to clean the colt off the way his mother

would have. Finally Jody runs out of the barn. It is dawn. He tries to be happy about the colt, but he keeps seeing Billy's bloody face and "haunted, tired eyes."

Chapter 3 Analysis

It is spring again—early March (working 11 months backward from the end of Chapter 3). This makes it about a year and a half later than Chapter 2, so Jody is 12 or nearly 12. He is still playing little-boy games of make-believe armies as he marches home from school, filling his lunch pail with horny-toads and the like. Any new thing is exciting to him—even a Montgomery Ward catalog.

Carl's reign of intimidation and domination continues, as Jody's first reaction to hearing that his father wants to see him is to assume that he has done some unknown thing wrong: ." . . it was impossible to know what action might later be construed as a crime." And indeed, Carl uses a stern tone with Jody when he sidles up to join the men at the pasture fence. However, Jody soon realizes that he is not going to be punished for anything this time. Instead, he is to be rewarded for his good work caring for and training the red pony with the chance to raise a colt. Jody's most fervent dreams can take hold again. He readily agrees to work hard and uncomplainingly in exchange for the five dollars his father will put up for the breeding fee. Jody's promise to work for the colt is the first promise to reflect the title of this part of the story.

Jody's life suddenly has purpose again, and Billy is again his mentor. The burgeoning springtime described as Jody leads Nellie to Jess Taylor's ranch underscores the hope Jody now has of getting a horse of his own. As the old saying goes, it is "the promise of spring"—another promise. Once Nellie is pregnant, she is part of the great promise of spring reflected in the blooming flowers, growing plants, and teeming wildlife.

Early in the summer, when Jody is asking Billy how it will be when Nellie has the colt, Billy's failed promise to save Gabilan is recalled. Jody says, "Billy, you won't let anything happen to the colt, will you?" Billy knows he had previously been infallible in Jody's eyes, and he is hurt by the knowledge that he isn't anymore. So he says, "I'll do everything I know, but I won't promise anything." However, months later, when Nellie has begun to be visibly pregnant and Jody seeks Billy's reassurance that he will teach Jody everything he needs to know about horses, Billy is confident again and comes close to making a promise: "I'll see you get a good colt. I'll start you right. And if you do like I say, you'll have the best horse in the county." Jody's fantasies about his great stallion Black Demon are nurtured by Billy's confident boasting. However, perhaps just as wonderful as the fantasies is Carl's genuine praise for Jody when he inspects Nellie: "You've done a good job." Jody knows he has earned his father's highest possible compliment.

When Jody goes to the barn the night of February 2 and Billy asks him what he's doing there, Jody again recalls the broken promise of the red pony: "You won't let anything happen, Billy, you're sure you won't?" Billy answers in a tone more like Carl's usual manner with Jody, but then repeats the more recent promise born in a moment of

boasting and optimism: "I told you I'd get you a good colt. Get along now." However, Jody, though he wishes he could, does not have confidence in Billy's promises. When his father is awakened by Jody's stumbling over a chair on his way back into the house, Jody blurts out, "However, the pony died—" and Carl sternly tells him not to blame it on Billy. Mrs. Tiflin's request that Jody clean his feet and go to bed underscores the everyday nature of the events that are unfolding—everyday and routine to the adults, but not to Jody, of course. He does not yet understand that life continually fluctuates between bursting promise and heart-rending violence; he has not yet made peace with this uncomfortable truth and so fights its existence by working as hard as he can and by fervently wishing for the fulfillment of all that great promise.

The heart-rending violence wins out this time. Jody cannot leave, even when he knows Billy must do something terrible to save the colt. After Billy has torn the colt out of Nellie and laid it at Jody's feet, he recalls his promise again: "There's your colt. I promised. And there it is. I had to do it—had to." The alternative, of course, was tearing the colt apart to save Nellie, as Billy had previously described to Jody. And then he reminds Jody of his fulfilled promise once more: "Wash him and dry him the way his mother would. You'll have to feed him by hand. However, there's your colt, the way I promised."

Jody tries to be happy about the colt, but he is overwhelmed by the violence he has just seen Billy Buck commit in order to fulfill his promise to Jody. He has cared for Nellie for almost a year; he has gained his father's highest praise by his diligent work with her. And now he has seen Billy Buck make a necessarily spur-of-the-moment decision to kill Nellie and save the colt, when the more logical choice would have been to save Nellie and try to breed her again another year. His joy is overwhelmed by the harsh reality of life and death and the wrenching collision of the two.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

On a Saturday afternoon in March, Billy Buck is raking together the last of the old hay. Jody comes out of the house eating a piece of buttered bread. He joins Billy at the remains of the haystack. They talk about the mice that have been living undisturbed in the bottom of the haystack for eight months. Jody says he will have a mouse hunt with the dogs. Billy reminds him to ask his father, who insists on granting permission for anything—no matter how trivial—done on the property. Jody and Billy talk about the possibility of rain.

Jody turns away from Billy to look at the hill where the road comes into their ranch. He watches one of the dogs digging into a squirrel hole. Suddenly he spots his father riding on horseback into the ranch. Jody sees something white in his father's hand—a letter. He runs down to the house and excitedly tells his mother, "We got a letter!" When Carl walks in, Ruth asks who the letter is from. Carl is annoyed with Jody for being a "Big-Britches" who minds "everybody's business but his own." Ruth defends Jody, saying he doesn't have enough to keep busy.

The letter is from Ruth's father. It announces that he will come Saturday for a visit. The letter has taken a day longer than it should have to arrive, so he will be arriving that very day. Carl gets a look on his face that makes Ruth angry; she demands to know what the matter is with him. Carl sheepishly says Ruth's father "only talks about one thing." Jody breaks in, "Indians! . . . Indians and crossing the plains!" Carl yells at him to get out, calling him a "Big-Britches" again. From outside, he hears his mother defending her father. Carl complains that the old man tells the same stories over and over, with exactly the same words each time. Ruth says crossing the plains "was the big thing in my father's life," that after the wagon train had fought through to the coast, there was nothing left for him to do. She asks Carl to be patient with him. Carl stomps out of the house.

After Jody rushes through his chores, he goes back to the kitchen and watches his mother to see if she is still angry with him. He suggests that he could go meet his grandfather in the road. His mother says that would be nice, so Jody goes back outside. He calls the dogs and starts up the hill toward the place where the road comes through. He follows the road with his eyes and spots a cart and horse far off, about to disappear behind the hill. He sits down on the ground to wait until they are back in sight.

When the cart comes back into sight, Jody sees a man dismount from the cart seat and unhook the check-rein. The man walks beside the horse up the hill. Jody runs down the road to meet them, romping along the way. When he is a short distance from his grandfather, he stops running. Grandfather greets Jody cheerfully. Jody invites Grandfather to join him on the mouse hunt the next day. Grandfather notices that Jody has grown about an inch. Jody is proud that he has grown "more than an inch since

Thanksgiving even." Jody tells Grandfather about Riley, their big boar, eating a hole into the haystack and getting smothered when it fell in on him.

At the house, everyone comes to greet Grandfather. Billy Buck has even shaved in the middle of the week, for he admires Grandfather and Grandfather admires him as a kindred spirit. As Billy takes Grandfather's horse to the barn, Grandfather tells the Tiflins that Billy is "a good boy" and that he knew Billy's father, old Mule-tail Buck, who was a mule packer. Ruth asks how long her father plans to stay, and he says about two weeks.

At dinner, Grandfather says he is hungry from driving out. He compares it to crossing the plains, when everyone got very hungry every night. Billy says moving around makes people hungrier. They talk about Billy's father. Grandfather starts telling an old story about running out of meat during the crossing, and having to watch the people so they wouldn't slaughter the team oxen. As the leader, he had to keep the people from killing the animals that were pulling the wagons. A moth gets into the room, and Billy and Carl's efforts to catch it and throw it outside interrupt Grandfather's story. When he starts again, Carl cuts him off.

After dinner, everyone sits in front of the fireplace. Grandfather starts telling the story he has told many times about the Piutes driving off 35 of the crossing party's horses. Carl cuts him off again, but he feels his wife's anger and says, "'Course I'd like to hear it again." Grandfather doesn't tell the story. Jody knows that Grandfather feels "collapsed and empty"; he compares how Grandfather feels to how he felt when he was called Big-Britches that afternoon. He asks Grandfather to "tell about Indians." Grandfather starts a new story, and all the adults are silent. Only Jody encourages him to continue.

When Grandfather finishes his story, Billy says goodnight. He asks Grandfather whether he has ever shown him the old pistol he has, and Grandfather says he has—that it reminds him of a gun he had when he was leading the people in the wagon train. After Billy leaves, Carl tries to start a new subject by asking Grandfather how dry the country is between there and Monterey. Grandfather says it is dry, and compares it to '87 (1887) and '61 (1861), when it was so dry the coyotes starved to death.

After the brief weather conversation, Carl tells Jody to go to bed. Jody gets his father's permission to kill the mice in the old haystack. He promises to kill them all the next day. In bed, Jody thinks about Grandfather's heroic time, when there were Indians and buffalo and "a race of giants . . . fearless men." He thinks of Grandfather on a "huge white horse," grandly leading the people across the plains and through the dangers.

In the morning, Jody is up early. He gets a stick ready for the mouse hunt. He is going to go out to the haystack to look it over, but Billy Buck, sitting on the back steps, tells him breakfast is almost ready. Jody leaves his mouse-hunting stick outside, telling Billy the mice don't know what's going to happen to them that day. "No, nor you either," Billy tells him, "nor me, nor anyone." Jody is struck by this idea, but then his mother rings the triangle for breakfast and he stops thinking.

Grandfather hasn't come down to breakfast yet, and Billy is concerned. Ruth says it takes him a while because he dresses with care. Carl makes a snide comment, and Ruth snaps at him. Irritated, Carl snaps back with a tirade about how tiresome Grandfather's repetitive stories are. As Carl says, "Nobody wants to hear about it over and over," they hear the door close quietly. They freeze. Then Grandfather walks in. Carl apologizes for what he said. Jody sees his father shaming himself by retracting his words, telling his father-in-law "I didn't mean it." Grandfather is gracious; he says he doesn't mind the words unless they're true. Carl apologizes again, and Grandfather tells him not to be sorry: "Maybe you're right. The crossing is finished. Maybe it should be forgotten, now it's done." Carl leaves, and Billy follows after eating quickly.

Jody tells Grandfather he still wants to hear the stories, and Grandfather tells him that's just because Jody is a boy; boys want to hear about the heroic deeds of men. Jody gets up and tells Grandfather he will wait outside for him with the mouse-hunting stick.

When Grandfather comes out, he sits on the porch. Jody urges him to join him at the haystack to kill the mice, but Grandfather says he just wants to sit in the sun. Jody tries to be excited about killing the mice, but he cannot. He goes back and sits at Grandfather's feet. He says he will kill the mice another time. They sit on the porch a long time. Grandfather starts talking about how he feels. He says the old stories aren't what he wants to tell people. He just knows how he wants people to feel when he tells about the old times. It is all about the "westering," he says, about getting a huge group of people across the country to bring life to the West. He says the group had to have a leader, and it could have been someone other than he. It was all about being part of a huge, important movement.

Jody listens until his grandfather has finished speaking. Then he says that maybe he could lead the people someday. Grandfather says there's no place to go—that there are old men lined up along the shore, hating the ocean for stopping their western movement. Jody says, "In boats I might, sir," but Grandfather says there is nowhere left to go, that everyplace is taken. However, worse than that, Grandfather says, is that the hunger of westering has disappeared. "Your father is right," he tells Jody.

Jody feels very sad. He offers to make Grandfather some lemonade. Grandfather is going to decline, but then he sees Jody's face and accepts the offer politely. Jody runs inside to ask his mother for a lemon to make Grandfather a lemonade. She assumes he wants one for himself, too, and is concerned when he says he doesn't want one. However, then she gets the juice squeezer down for him and tells him to take a lemon out of the cooler.

Chapter 4 Analysis

It is March, and Jody is still described as a "little boy" (he is now about 12 ½ or nearly 13), so this part of the story likely takes place only about a month after the end of Chapter 3. When Jody tells Grandfather that he has grown more than an inch since Thanksgiving, we are reminded that the red pony died right before the prior

Thanksgiving. Since then, Jody has nurtured the pregnant mare, Nellie, and watched Billy kill Nellie to save his colt. However, there is no mention of the colt in this part of the story. In fact, it is immediately apparent that Jody is awash in idleness: he tramps down to see Billy, scuffing his shoes along the way though he has been told not to do so; he picks up a stone to throw at one of the cats; he hangs around chatting with Billy; he hatches a plot to kill the haystack mice. When Carl gets annoyed about Jody pre-empting his announcement of the letter from Grandfather, Ruth defends Jody, saying, "Well, he hasn't enough to keep him busy." If the colt were around, Jody would be constantly busy at feeding it, since it would only be a month or six weeks old or so.

However, though Jody is idle, he does not seem to be moping about the apparent death of the colt. He tests out his "mature profanity" on Billy. He boldly announces the letter Carl is carrying, taking the risk that he might anger his father (as, in fact, he does). He even interrupts his father when Carl and Ruth are having a tense exchange about the limited subject matter of Grandfather's stories, excitedly bursting out, "Indians! Indians and crossing the plains!" Rather than mopey, Jody seems somewhat reckless in his idleness. He has returned to his hurried habits in his chores, too; he dumps out the grain for the chickens, gathers the eggs from nests but apparently doesn't hunt for any hidden ones, and makes two armloads of wood look like a lot more by artful stacking—something he was scolded for in Chapter 1. Although he finishes his approach on the road in "a dignified walk," for most of his journey out to meet Grandfather on the road he runs and scrambles along in his old boyish manner.

An alternative reading to the total absence of the colt is to consider this segment a "prequel" to Chapter 1. If we read it that way, Jody would be only ten or perhaps even nine. His comment about growing an inch since Thanksgiving would still serve as a poignant reminder of the red pony's death, earlier in "real time" but delivered after the fact in narrative time. When Jody is lying in bed thinking of "the heroic time," he realizes he is not "of heroic timber. No one living now, save possibly Billy Buck, was worthy to do the things that had been done." So Billy is high in Jody's estimation again, whereas at the end of Chapter 3, "the bloody face, and the haunted, tired eyes of Billy Buck hung in the air ahead of him" as he runs out of the barn to get the hot water. One might argue that this heroic estimation of Billy makes more sense if it takes place before the appearance of the red pony. On the other hand, it may also reflect Jody's growing understanding of the complicated interplay between life and death, and of the terrible but very brave and daring choice Billy made in choosing the colt over Nellie. Perhaps he has come to realize that Billy cannot be infallible because no one can, but that Billy is an estimable hero anyway. Or perhaps, in the alternative reading of Chapter 4 as a prequel, Billy cannot be infallible because Jody has not yet seen him fail.

In either case, we still see Jody enthralled with heroic fantasies: "He thought of Grandfather on a huge white horse, marshaling the people. Across his mind marched the great phantoms, and they marched off the earth and they were gone." He is beginning to see that the great, heroic times have passed forever (thus bolstering the original reading of this part as subsequent to the tragedy of Nellie).

Jody's mindset is challenged again by Billy Buck's philosophical comment in response to Jody's chatter about his planned mouse hunt; he is staggered by the thought that he doesn't know what's going to happen to him that day any more than the mice know what will happen to them. Just as he is about to follow this daunting train of thought, his mother rings the triangle for breakfast and he is snapped back to the present reality of eating, working, and getting on with the routine.

Part of that routine is his father's impatience with Grandfather's fixation on the heroic past. Although Jody likes his grandfather and the old stories, he knows his father's apology to grandfather is "an awful thing . . . . He was tearing himself to pieces to talk like that. It was a terrible thing to him to retract a word, but to retract it in shame was infinitely worse." Grandfather's calm acceptance of Carl's anger further upsets the normal order of things—that is, the order in which Carl is strong and gruff and often a little mean in his confident power over his domain. Grandfather graciously accepts the fact that Carl may be right, despite his meanness—the crossing is over and perhaps it should be relegated to the un-remarked-upon past. And Grandfather's graciousness is too much for Carl to take. Having made his apology, he has lost his appetite. He leaves abruptly and goes out to work, where the order of things is as it should be.

Jody lingers and tries to make Grandfather feel better by telling him he enjoys the old stories. Grandfather remarks again that of course he does, because he is a little boy. Jody takes this in stride and tells Grandfather he will wait for him outside so they can go on their mouse hunt. However, when Grandfather doesn't want to participate in the mouse hunt, it loses its appeal. It is a little boy's game—just a distraction from the importance of the time Jody can share with his discouraged grandfather, and a pale reflection of the glorious deeds of the old man and even of the more recent accomplishments of Jody's own father, who after all owns and runs a cattle ranch—no small work. Jody has earlier described the accidental death of Riley, the good old boar who smothered in the haystack. Perhaps Jody begins to see the gratuitous killing of the haystack mice as a mockery of the several dreadful deaths he has witnessed.

When Jody returns to his grandfather and sits at his feet, there is another echo of Christian symbolism; many Christian hymns urge believers to "sit at the feet of Jesus" to express their devotion and submission. When his grandfather talks about what he wishes he could tell people, he says, "The westering was as big as God . . . ," and he was the leader, a kind of messiah. He is a sort of Christ figure, telling stories to get his message to his people. However, there is a passing of the torch, as Jody takes up the thread of his grandfather's hope: "Maybe I could lead the people some day." Grandfather tells him the hard truth, and in doing so duplicates the words of Christ from the cross: "It is finished." The lemonade Jody offers is a faint echo of the sour wine that was offered to the crucified Christ, and Grandfather's acceptance of it is Jody's salvation. For he is very sad, knowing that his heroic dreams cannot come true. He becomes the new "leader of the people," forging a new trail of love and service as he rushes inside to make Grandfather a lemonade. He cannot blaze into new territory mounted on a galloping steed, but he can honor his Grandfather's heroic past by being with him, listening, and being kind. His good heart will prevail over the darkness of the unavoidable death that permeates life in this still-rough West.

Characters

Billy Buck

Billy Buck is the ranch hand who is known for his gentle understanding of horses. He promises, at one point, that nothing will happen to Jody's red pony. Unfortunately, the pony becomes very sick, and Billy cannot save him. Billy feels very bad about having made a promise that he could not keep.

When one of the mares becomes impregnated, Billy knows better than to promise anything to Jody. He tells Jody that he will do his best to give him a healthy colt but that there are no guarantees. In order to deliver the colt, however, Billy must kill the mother, for the colt is turned the wrong way in her womb.

Billy's character is in stark contrast to Carl Tiflin's. Billy is more sensitive, more compassionate, Billy's character is in stark contrast to Carl Tiflin's. Billy is more sensitive, more compassionate, less harsh, and more understanding. He listens to Billy, and he also listens to Grandfather's stories, just as he always listened to them. He is much more sensitive toward Gitano, who has worked hard all his life and, according to Billy, deserves time to rest.

Gitano

Gitano is an old man who comes back to the Tiflins' ranch to die. It was on this same property that he and his father were born. It is not explained how they lost their property, but Gitano insists that he is staying there until he dies.

Gitano is told that he is not welcome on the property, and because he does not have any other place that he wants to go, early in the morning he disappears with the old horse Easter and a sword that his father had left him.

Grandfather

Mrs. Tiflin's father comes to visit his daughter and her family. He is a proud man whose time has passed. He has nothing to look forward to, and so he lives in the past. The highlight of his life occurred while he led pioneers across the Plains into California. Once he reached the ocean, he had nowhere else to go. Since that time he has been angry at the ocean for having stopped him. To give himself a sense of worth, he constantly repeats his stories. He does not understand that other people do not get the same feelings that he gets in retelling them. His spirit is broken when his son-in-law tells him, indirectly, that he is tired of hearing the same stories over and over again.

Jess Taylor

Jess Taylor is the neighbor who owns the stallion that eventually impregnates Jody's mare. He rescues Jody when the stallion breaks loose to get to the mare that Jody is leading up the long driveway. Jess suggests that Jody wait in the house but understands Jody's desire to watch the mating.

Carl Tiflin

Carl Tiflin has very little about him that is likeable. He is a hard worker, and he recognizes that his son deserves to be rewarded for being so good. His saving grace is his sensitivity in knowing to bring home one of the most thrilling gifts he could give his son. However, after bringing home the red pony, Carl has very little to do with helping Jody raise the pony. Likewise, Carl knows that after the pony dies, he needs to replace it with something else. He offers Jody another try at raising a colt by having his mare impregnated. However, once again, it is Billy, not Carl, who helps Jody through the whole ordeal.

Carl is not very sympathetic when Gitano shows up at the ranch. He does not have any empathy for the old man, not even as much empathy as he has for his old horse Easter. When Gitano takes the horse into the mountains, Carl assumes that Gitano has stolen him. He has no awareness that Gitano has gone into the mountains to kill the horse and then to kill himself.

Carl's worst side appears in the last story when his father-in-law comes to visit. Carl is totally incapable of showing the old man any respect. He is bored with his stories and lets everyone, including his father-in-law, know it. Through his crudeness, his father-in-law's spirit is broken.

Jody Tiflin

Jody is the young boy on whom the stories in this novel focus. The stories follow a rite of passage for Jody as he learns how to be responsible for animals and to experience the pain of losing an animal to death, and he begins to show signs of maturing into a man.

Jody is often quiet and shy, but he soaks in all the conversations and emotions that are around him. He painfully watches his red pony grow more and more ill. In the end, he also finds his pony on top of the hill, having run away to die. He sees the buzzards come down and begin to consume the dead pony.

Later he watches his mare and a neighbor's stallion mate and then patiently awaits the new colt. The arrival of the colt is traumatic due to complications, and the mare must be killed. Jody learns about the cycles of death and birth through witnessing the lives of the animals around him.

It is not just the animals that teach him, though. Jody is very aware of Gitano's impending death, more so than anyone else around him. He is a curious boy and has deep insights into the emotions of those around him. When he sees Gitano's sword, he senses that he must keep a secret. When he hears that Gitano has gone up into the mountains, he knows why Gitano has gone there. Likewise, Jody is also very sensitive to his grandfather's feelings. He knows that his father has broken his grandfather's spirit, and Jody tries to repair it.

Mrs. Tiflin

Mrs. Tiflin is never given a first name, and she is seldom seen outside of the kitchen. Her character only comes to life in the last story, when her father comes to visit. She finally speaks back to her husband in this story, letting him know her true feelings about his impatience with her father. Other than that one moment, Mrs. Tiflin is either cooking or cleaning.

Setting

The stories take place on the Tiflin ranch in the Salinas Valley, California.

Steinbeck's evocation of the vital beauty of the ranch setting matches his work in Of Mice and Men, and his symbols grow naturally out of this setting. The setting stresses the end of the frontier and of the American dream; in a sense Jody's maturation matches that of modem America. In its depiction of an American variation of a universal experience, The Red Pony deserves comparison with the finest of American fiction, especially initiation tales such as William Faulkner's The Bear (1942) or Ernest Hemingway's Nick Adams stories.

Social Concerns

A writer of great talent, sensitivity, and imagination, John Steinbeck entered into the mood of the country in the late 1930s with an extraordinary responsiveness. The Depression had elicited a reevaluation of American culture, a reassessment of the American dream; a harsh realism of observation was balanced by a warm emphasis on human dignity. Literature and the other arts joined social, economic, and political thought in contrasting traditional American ideals with the bleak reality of bread lines and shantytowns.

Perhaps the major symbol of dislocation was the Dust Bowl. The American garden became a wasteland from which its dispossessed farmers fled. The arts in the 1930s focused on these harsh images and tried to find in them the human dimensions which promised a new beginning.

Incidents such as the killing of the mare in The Red Pony are powerful and may upset young readers. But few writers have better exposed the dark underside of the American Dream, while simultaneously celebrating the great hope symbolized in that dream: the hope of human development. Steinbeck's best fiction depicts a paradise lost but also suggests a paradise to be regained in the future. Despite Steinbeck's faults and failures, his best literary works demonstrate a greatness of heart and mind rarely found in modern American literature.

Techniques

The techniques in The Red Pony typify the style that won Steinbeck immense popularity. Rising to prominence at the height of the Depression, Steinbeck seemed to reflect the mood of the era with his bare lines of simple prose.

Steinbeck derives his literary power from his use of symbolism for ironic effect. The symbolic images in the plot allow the reader to perceive the significance of an event on a much deeper level than do the characters. The pony in The Red Pony, for example, functions as a symbol of Jody's boyhood and innocence as well as a symbol of his future. When the pony dies, the reader experiences a sense of loss, because the pony's death represents Jody's loss of innocence. But while the reader understands that Jody's life has been dramatically altered by the death of the pony, Jody, ironically, grieves for his pony without the ability to fully see the death in a larger context.

During World War II, when people began to realize how complicated the world had become, Steinbeck's development as a novelist faltered, and he never recovered his artistic momentum.

Even East of Eden (1952), the work he thought his masterpiece, proved a critical failure although a popular success. Since his death, Steinbeck has remained widely read, both in America and abroad. His critical reputation has enjoyed a modest revival, and will most likely continue to develop, for few writers have better celebrated the American dream or traced the dark shape of the American nightmare.

Thematic Overview

The themes of death and life converge naturally in the first three stories, preparing readers for the final section of the sequence, "The Leader of the People." This story brings the sequence to an end with another vision of death and change. Jody's grandfather comes to visit, retelling his timeworn stories of the great wagon crossing. Carl Tiflin cruelly hurts the old man by revealing that nobody except Jody is really interested in these repetitious tales. The grandfather realizes that Carl is right, but later he tells Jody that the adventurous stories were not the point, that his message was "Westering" itself. For the grandfather, "Westering" is a force like the frontier, the source of American identity; now with the close of the frontier, "Westering" has ended. Westerners have de generated to petty landholders such as Carl Tiflin and aging cowboys such as Billy Buck. In his grandfather's ramblings, Jody discovers a sense of mature purpose, and by the conclusion of the sequence he, too, can hope to be a leader of the people.

Themes

Rite of Passage

Over the course of the four sections of this book, the protagonist, Jody Tiflin, goes through several experiences that force him to encounter many difficult emotions. In the process of dealing with the harsh realities of life, Jody changes from a naive young boy into a responsible and maturing young man. Many ancient cultures have specific ceremonies for inducting a young boy into the realm of grown men. These ceremonies are often referred to as rites of passage. In modern cultures, even though the ceremony is less traditional or formalized, young boys and girls still experience, sometimes randomly, certain types of rituals that mark them for life. In urban settings, in the absence of strong family relationships, this rite of passage might be experienced through membership in a gang. Biologically, every young boy and girl goes through physical changes that signal the onset of adulthood.

Jody's rite of passage is expressed in his having to come to terms first with the care and development of a young, somewhat wild colt. Next, he must face the death of his colt, which makes him reflect on the brevity of life, including his own. This concept of death is further developed when Gitano appears in the second section and when Grandfather comes to visit in the last story. Jody becomes involved in the process of aging and the sense of loss of purpose when he takes an interest in both old men. Gitano is compared to the old horse Easter, both of them having worked hard in their youth and now being set out to pasture. Jody senses Gitano's need, like an old animal, to find some place to die. With his grandfather, Jody understands the loss of purpose that comes over some old people when they are no longer appreciated.

These experiences deepen Jody's respect for life. He thinks about emotions that as a child he had never considered before. He takes an interest in others, moving from the egocentric focus of his youth into the more compassionate stage of an adult. In addition, when he watches the mating of his mare with the neighbor's stallion, he gains a deeper understanding of procreation. He watches Billy deliver the colt at the expense of the mare's life. These are tough circumstances that mark Jody's entrance into adulthood.

Death

The theme of death looms over all the sections of this book. In the opening pages, Jody wanders out into the field and encounters buzzards, probably having found a dead cow out in the pastures. Shortly after receiving the red pony as a gift from his father, the pony becomes ill and runs away to die. Jody finds the dead pony with buzzards standing on the carcass. He kills one of the buzzards but later is reminded by Billy that the buzzards were not responsible for the red pony's death. Although Jody wants to vent his anger on someone or something, he learns that there is really no one to blame. He must accept death as a part of life.

The red pony's is not the only death that occurs. Gitano, the old ranch hand, returns to the place of his birth to die. Gitano shows Jody an old sword that he carries with him, a sword that was handed down to him by his father. Gitano does not have much to say about the sword, but Jody senses that it represents something very serious in Gitano's life and, possibly, in Gitano's reasons for being there. Jody tells no one about the sword, and the next morning when Gitano disappears with the old horse Easter and the sword, the reader is left to surmise that Gitano has gone into the mountains to die.

In the third section, there is the horrific death of the pregnant mare. Billy must kill the mare in order to save the colt. This is a hard decision that he must make. Either the colt or the mare must be sacrificed. Possibly because Billy feels guilty about the death of the red pony, he chooses to save the colt so that he can give the young horse to Jody.

In the last section of the book, although Grandfather is not near death or showing any signs of ill health, there is a sense that his life is over. Grandfather loses his sense of purpose. The greatest experience in his life ended many years earlier, and since then, he has remained stuck at the shore, unable to move ahead. Grandfather represents a more symbolic form of death.

Old Age

Tied in with death is the theme of old age. As presented in this book, old age has very little meaning. There is the old horse Easter who has been put to pasture after having served her master with many years of hard labor. Gitano is like Easter in many ways. He is very old, and he has worked many years. He cannot or does not choose to work any more and has decided to die. Although Billy argues that Gitano has a right to rest and be taken care of, Carl is not ready to take on that responsibility. Carl is more sensitive to his horse than he is to Gitano, who is a stranger. Carl even admits that it would be more humane to shoot his old horse than to let him suffer the aches and pains of aging. Although Gitano has family members to go to, he chooses not to burden them. He decides to go off into the mountains possibly to kill himself rather than to allow someone else to take care of him.

Grandfather, in the last section of the book, also has trouble dealing with old age. Carl is no more sympathetic toward his father-in-law than he was with Gitano. Carl is tired of hearing Grandfather's old stories. He makes Grandfather feel that his time has passed and that no one is interested in hearing about the old days and Grandfather's glory. Grandfather, feeling lost about his present situation, returns to the stories in order to return to a time when he felt worthwhile. He led many people out to the West Coast. He faced challenges and hardships that he feels his son-in-law does not understand. Modern life is too soft for him. However, Grandfather is too old for new adventures, or so he believes. There is no place left to be discovered, no place left to go to, no need for him to lead people anywhere. Old age is more a punishment for Grandfather than a reward for all the experiences of his youth.

Style

Linked Short Stories

Three of the four stories in this book were published as separate short stories. What holds these stories together so that they can be considered a book is the elements that they have in common. These are common characters, setting, and themes. Linked short stories are not as tightly connected as the chapters in a book. First of all, they stand on their own, each section completing a thought. Second, the connections between the sections are rather loose. There is no explanation of anything that was left unresolved in the previous section. For example, when Billy delivers the colt in the third section, there is nothing said about Jody's reaction or the care of the colt in the fourth section. It is almost as if the colt did not exist in the final chapter of the book.

However, there's enough of a connection between the sections that the reader gets a sense of continuation. Jody continues to have similar experiences that move him forward into the world of adults. Personality traits of Carl, Jody's father, remain consistent from first section to the end. Billy feels sorry about Jody having lost the red pony in the beginning of the book and remains sensitive about this through the third portion, when he must decide to kill the mare in order to save the newborn colt.

Linked short stories might have been used in order for Steinbeck to publish each section separately and thus gain an audience for the novel. Choosing between linked short stories and chapters may just reflect a preferred style of writing. With linked short stories, each section develops a theme and completes it. In writing chapters, themes are usually only slightly developed in each separate chapter and then more fully engaged throughout the entire work, coming to conclusions only in the last chapters.

Setting

The setting of this novel is at the ranch and in agricultural valleys of California during the early part of the twentieth century. It is a time of transition, when old ways are quickly vanishing. This is reflected in the characters Gitano, whose Spanish heritage has been wiped out by the white settlers, and Grandfather, whose mission in life has been exhausted because there is no more frontier to be discovered.

In placing the story on a western farm, Jody has the opportunity to witness the basic elements of life—procreation, birth, and death—by watching the animals around him. Because he lives in a somewhat remote area, he gains his knowledge from nature.

Although Grandfather believes there is no more frontier left, Jody eyes the mountains, where no one lives and few people that he knows have ever been, as a place of great mystery and possible future exploration. He also wonders about the ocean and what might lie beyond.

Symbolism

Steinbeck employs many different symbols in his writing. Most obvious is the ruined adobe house in which Gitano was raised. The adobe was a mud construction that demanded regular care. The structure eventually becomes all but washed away, similar to the Spanish culture that Gitano represents. Gitano comes back to die on his family's homeland. However, the Tiflins have taken over the property and do not welcome Gitano back. This symbolizes the taking over of the valley by white settlers, who eventually pushed the Spanish and Mexican cultures away.

The Gabilan mountains symbolize many things for different characters in the story. For Jody, they are wild and mysterious, and that is why he decides to call his red pony Gabilan. The mountains represent his adulthood, in some ways, as he knows he wants to explore them as soon as he is old enough. To Grandfather, the mountains are meaningless now. Previously, they had represented a challenge as he fought to traverse them on his way to the ocean when he first crossed from the Plains into California. Now, they are just in his way when he wants to visit his daughter. They represent nothing special. They remind Gitano of his youth, and they represent a place of death.

The haystack in the last section of the book symbolizes the past for Grandfather. Jody tells the story about the old boar (which could be construed as a pun for the word *bore*, as when Grandfather repeats his stories), in which the pig dug into the haystack to get the mice and the haystack smothered him. In much the same way, Grandfather continues to dig into the past, repeating his stories for anyone who has the patience to listen to him. Grandfather, too, is slowly smothered by his past, as he finds no way of living in the present.

Historical Context

Crossing the Plains to California

Many of the trails that lead across the Plains to the West Coast began along the Missouri River in such places as Independence and St. Joseph, Missouri. From here, pioneers heading either to Oregon or California would begin their long and treacherous treks across the wild lands.

The major routes followed the Platte River in Nebraska to the Sweetwater River in Wyoming, a nearly eight-hundred-mile-long section of the trail and a halfway mark for many of the pioneers. At the Sweetwater, the trails split, one taking a more northern route (like the Mormon Trail) and others taking a southern route.

The next major junction was the Snake River, which many people picked up at the Fort Hall trading post in Pocatella in southern Idaho. At this point, those people interested in going to California broke away from the groups that were crossing the mountains to Oregon.

Before the gold rush in 1849, the majority of people took the trail to Oregon to the Willamette Valley. Between 1841 and 1848, it is estimated that over eleven thousand people immigrated to the Oregon valley with less than three thousand continuing south to California. However, during the peak of the gold rush, almost two hundred thousand people are estimated to have taken the southern route to California, while only thirty-five hundred crossed over to the more northern territories.

Despite Jody's grandfather in *The Red Pony* declaring that there was no place for him to go at the end of the trail because the ocean stopped him when he reached the shores of the Pacific Ocean, Monterey, where he probably lived, was actually one of the major seaports on the Pacific Ocean in the late 1800s. He could have hopped onto any of the large trading/importing ships and traveled to any place in the world.

Salinas, California

Salinas, California is called the Salad Bowl of America for all the lettuces and other salad greens that are grown in this lush valley. Located just east of the coastal mountains that separate Salinas from the seaside town of Monterey on the Pacific Coast, Salinas enjoys the benefits of a dry, warm climate.

Salinas was not always an agricultural area. Initially, it was the home to several small tribes of Native Americans, who lived there for many thousands of years before Spanish soldiers and missionaries arrived. Under Spanish rule, the main focus of the population was the coastal areas, and so the valley, where Salinas is located, was largely left on its own. However, when the Mexicans overthrew the Spanish rulers, the Mexican

government began giving out land grants. From these land grants grew the communities that would eventually make up such towns as Salinas.

During the early stages of the gold rush, James Bryant Hill bought a large land grant in the valley and was one of the first people to plant crops there. It would not be until 1867 that a partnership between a few large farmers and cattle rancher Eugene Sherwood would be formed. These men laid out a plan for a half-mile square that would become the heart of Salinas City.

At the time of the writing of *The Red Pony*, wheat was still the main crop grown in the valley. Most of the land was still used for cattle. Today, Salinas is known for its crops of lettuce, artichokes, broccoli, sugar beets, and beans. Due to its rich valley soils, Salinas would eventually become one of the wealthiest cities per capita in the United States.

Critical Overview

John Steinbeck enjoyed a very long writing career. His first book was published in 1929, when he was twenty-seven years old, and his last book went to print in 1961, seven years before his death. However, he did not, despite his having won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1962, enjoy critical support throughout his entire writing career. As a matter of fact, many critics believed that his finest work was *The Grapes of Wrath*, which was published early in his career, in 1939. Similarly, some believed that the awarding of the Nobel Prize was actually a reflection on his early stage of writing and not for the works that he created after 1939.

Steinbeck's first three novels received very little attention. It was not until he published *Tortilla Flat* (1935) that he gained recognition. Over his long career he achieved great success, though some critics choose to give more weight to the works written in his early career. The works produced within this time frame include *The Red Pony*.

In general, Steinbeck's work was often praised for its positive view of life. When he used California as a setting, critics believed that his work flowed more naturally and clearly, such as in *The Red Pony*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *Of Mice and Men*. Although his male characters were often well developed and thus highly complimented by reviewers, Steinbeck was often criticized for neglecting the women in his stories, for leaving them flat and stereotypical.

A reviewer for the *Library Journal* praised a new edition of Steinbeck's collected works, which includes *The Red Pony*, calling it "something special" and "essential for all serious American literature collections." In an earlier review, a writer for the *Library Journal* referred to Steinbeck as belonging in "America's elite class of writers." In offering an overview of all of Steinbeck's works, Warren French, writing in the *Reference Guide to American Literature*, described *The Red Pony* as "Steinbeck's most popular and masterful work."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Hart has degrees in English literature and creative writing and focuses her writing on literary themes. In this essay, Hart examines Steinbeck's methods in creating the rites of passage theme in his novel.

John Steinbeck's *The Red Pony* was originally written as four separate short stories, with each story showing different stages of Jody Tiflin's rite of passage into manhood. In each story (or chapter), Steinbeck carefully and skillfully brings together specific circumstances that the young Jody must face. Through the use of explicit examples, as well as subtle metaphors, Steinbeck emphasizes certain character traits of Jody and shows how his personality matures from the first section to the last. By looking closely at Steinbeck's methods of demonstrating the changes in Jody, a greater appreciation of the author's writing skill is unveiled and a deeper appreciation of the story is gained.

The first section of *The Red Pony* is called "The Gift," and the first time that Jody is introduced to the reader, he is referred to as "the boy Jody." Immediately following this, Steinbeck writes: "He was only a little boy, ten years old." There is no doubt in the reader's mind, at this point, that Jody is young. Steinbeck makes sure that Jody is perceived as nowhere near being a man, not even a young man. Jody is also very obedient, Steinbeck relates. When he hears his mother ring the triangle, a sign to get out of bed and down to the kitchen for breakfast, there is absolutely no hesitation. "It didn't occur to him to disobey the harsh note."

Jody washes his face and turns away from his mother "shyly." When he sits down at the table, he scrapes away "a spot of blood from one of the egg yolks." With these words, Steinbeck presents the innocence of Jody. Not only is Jody obedient and shy but he is unaware of mating; he is presexual. Billy Buck, the ranch hand, must inform Jody that the spot of blood is the sign of fertilization that the rooster has left behind. It's interesting to note that Steinbeck does not have Jody's mother or his stern father report this fact to Jody. Later on, the reader will discover that Billy is the one person most responsible for Jody's rite of passage. Steinbeck, at this initial stage, is foreshadowing these circumstances.

Next, Steinbeck has the young boy wishing to go along with his father and Billy as they prepare to take a herd of cattle to town to be butchered. This is a grown-up chore, and Jody longs to be included. So despite Jody's conscious innocence, something is stirring inside of him, something that senses the changes that are about to take place that will push him into that world of men. In the meantime, however, Jody is patient and so in awe of his father that, even though he wants to go along, he does not even ask permission to accompany them.

To further insinuate the transition that Jody is about to experience, Steinbeck then has Jody climb up the hill and look back at the ranch from an elevated position, where "he felt an uncertainty in the air, a feeling of change and of loss and of the gain of new and unfamiliar things." At this same point in the story, Steinbeck brings in the image of two

buzzards, which signal death. Although Jody may be unfamiliar with some aspects of nature, he is not unaware of the cycle of life and death. He is disturbed by the buzzards, but he understands that, ugly as they may be, they rid the land of carrion. Death brings life to the buzzards, and the buzzards, in turn, rid the land of contamination. Jody is old enough to understand this on a rational level. He has yet to experience loss and death on an emotional level. The events that are about to unfold will teach him those very lessons, and they will mark the first steps toward adulthood.

Slowly but surely, Steinbeck hints at a sense of revolt stirring inside of Jody, another of the initial signs that a child is beginning to move away from his parents, moving toward independence. The first mention of this occurs as Jody smashes a muskmelon with his heel. He doesn't feel good about his action. He knows it is wrong, and he tries to hide the evidence by burying the cracked melon. However, just a couple of paragraphs later, Steinbeck mentions that Jody was feeling "a spirit of revolt" once he joined his friends at school. After the school day has ended, Jody again goes up into the hills, this time with a shotgun, and aims it at the house. Although the gun is unloaded, Jody knows that if his father had seen him do it, he would have to wait another two years before his father would give him any ammunition. With these examples of rebellion, Steinbeck shows that Jody is straining at the reins, wanting to be rid of his father's restrictions but, at the same time, still in fear of them.

The next big event, the gift of the red pony, marks yet another stage in the young boy's development. First of all, the pony cost money, which means that Jody's father, in giving Jody a valuable gift, is developing a trust in his maturing son. Jody has somehow shown his father that he is worthy of that investment, and now he must prove it. In caring for another living creature, Jody will also develop a sense of responsibility. In attending to the pony, Jody will hopefully develop a meaningful relationship that will open up his heart to more mature emotions.

The depth of those emotions is increased as Jody learns to take care of the pony. He is first exhilarated by the joy of owning the pony. Then, when the pony becomes ill, Jody's heart is wrenched by fear and worry. On top of being distressed about the pony, Jody's innocence is strained in another area. His complete trust that adults always know what they are doing is challenged when Billy promises that it won't rain on the day that Jody decides to leave the pony in the corral while he goes to school. It does rain that day, and the pony's illness appears to be a direct result of the inclement weather. Billy, with whom Jody has entrusted not only the care of his horse but also the care of his emotions, has disappointed him. This disillusionment with the adult world is another stage in the progression towards maturity. Children place all their faith in people who are older than they are when they believe that they themselves are not capable of making decisions. However, as they grow more experienced, the adult world appears in a more normal fashion; that is, men and women are seen as fallible. They are not the gods of wisdom and perfect understanding that children once believed them to be. In understanding that adults are capable of making mistakes, children gain courage to trust their own instincts and to reach their own conclusions about the world. Steinbeck demonstrates this stage in Jody's development by making Billy imperfect, by making him, despite all his wisdom, subject to at least an occasional error in judgment.

Before the first section of this novel ends, Steinbeck hurls Jody into a battle, a sure sign that the young boy is entering a sort of initiation rite into manhood. The pony has run away to die, and Jody finds the pony's dead body being attacked by a flock of buzzards. Angered by the death, Jody takes his frustration and pain out on one of the buzzards. Earlier, Jody smashed a muskmelon, something a young boy would do. Later, he slings rocks at small birds and rabbits. Here, in the final scene of this chapter, Jody takes on something that "was nearly as big as he was." The battle that Steinbeck describes is not a pretty sight, but it signifies an age-old scene. Jody faces death in defeating the buzzard. Now, Jody's feelings are fully bloomed, as noted by Billy's comment to Jody's father, who appears to be unaware of how much Jody has grown. When Carl Tiflin tries to comfort Jody by telling him that the buzzards didn't kill the pony, something that a father might tell a much younger son, Billy retorts: "Jesus Christ! man, can't you see how he'd feel about it?" Billy steps in as caretaker, sort of a cross between a father figure and an older brother. Carl appears unable to accept that his son is becoming a man, whereas Billy not only sees but welcomes the changes.

Each of the succeeding chapters reiterates the changes that Jody is going through. In "The Great Mountains," Jody holds a secret to himself when Gitano, the old man who comes to die at his birthplace, shows him an old sword that he carries with him. Holding onto a secret is a very difficult task, especially for a child. The fact that Jody is capable of doing this without being told to do so demonstrates a further example of his maturity. He senses that the sword represents something that must be kept in the realm of the unknown. "It would be a dreadful thing to tell anyone about it, for it would destroy some fragile structure of truth." At the end of the chapter, only Jody is capable of understanding why Gitano disappears with the old horse Easter. Steinbeck does not state the reasons, leaving the reader to manufacture the ending, just as he leaves his character Jody to do the same.

The third chapter, "The Promise," gives Jody another chance to raise a pony. However, if this were the only purpose of this section, it would be redundant, since the reader has already been exposed to Jody's ability to care for a pony. So "The Promise" takes on a more meaningful theme, leaving the raising of the colt to the imagination of the reader. The action of this section focuses on reinforcing two concepts already presented in previous chapters—the cycle of life and death and the realization that there are no guarantees in life. It also provides Jody with an up-close view of the mating process. Jody witnesses the impregnation of his mare, thus initiating him to sexuality, another important stage in the rite of passage. Jody not only observes the mating, he monitors the complete development of the consequences of that encounter. He learns patience from having to wait for signs of pregnancy and eventually the delivery of the colt. He gains compassion from watching the suffering of the mare in the delivery, as well as the suffering of Billy when he must choose between the life of the mare and the survival of the colt. In the last chapter of this book, Jody transfers the compassion he has gained to a member of his family.

Compassion is one of the final stages of full maturity. In childhood, the world appears to revolve around the self. Everything is defined by how it affects the self. Only a fully mature adult is able to relinquish the need to think only of him- or herself in order to

comprehend and empathize with the emotions of other people. In "The Leader of the People," the final chapter, Jody's maternal grandfather makes a visit. His grandfather lives in the past, and this annoys the other adults in the family. Grandfather is a storyteller; however, his stories have been repeated so many times that everyone knows them by heart. For the adults who lack compassion, Grandfather is a bore. In this chapter, Steinbeck sets Jody at odds with his father. Carl is the least compassionate person. He makes rude remarks and is, in the end, somewhat embarrassed when Grandfather overhears him complain about the stories.

Jody, on the other hand, who has been deemed "Big-Britches" by his father, a term meant to imply that he is growing up, but with negative connotations, is very sensitive to his grandfather's needs. He knows what it feels like to be the butt of his father's insults. Since Jody has gained the insight of compassion, he is able to transfer his feelings to his grandfather, whereas his father is unable to do this. Jody understands, maybe intuitively, that Grandfather needs to feel wanted. Grandfather's stories are not so much to glorify himself as to relive those feelings of people coming together and doing something magnificent. Once Grandfather reached the furthest edges of the West, there could be no more "westering" for him. He had reached his limits.

While Grandfather, in old age, finds life waning, Jody finds life just beginning. At the opposite ends of the spectrum, the young and the old meet and learn from one another. In the final lines of the story, Steinbeck demonstrates that Jody has passed the ritual, or rite of passage, from childhood to adulthood, by having him think not of himself but purely of someone else. He tries to console Grandfather in the best way that he can. When Grandfather tells him that the ocean stopped his progress, Jody tries to pick up the trail by stating that when he grows up, maybe he'll lead people. When Grandfather protests that the land has run out, Jody

tells his grandfather, "In boats I might, sir." When Grandfather further discourages him, Jody feels sad, but he is not defeated. Instead of giving in to his grandfather's depression, Jody offers a gift: "If you'd like a glass of lemonade I could make it for you." Grandfather gives in, and when Jody's mother discovers that she is mistaken in believing that Jody is doing this just to con a glass of lemonade for himself, she is astonished. Her surprise goes deeper than just realizing that Jody has made a very unselfish act; she is dumbfounded by the realization that her little boy has grown up.

Source: Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on *The Red Pony*, in *Novels for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Adaptations

Steinbeck wrote a screenplay for *The Red Pony*, and it was produced in 1949, starring Myrna Loy and Robert Mitchum. Noted American composer Aaron Copeland wrote the musical score. The story was rewritten for television in 1973 and starred Henry Fonda and Maureen O'Hara.

Topics for Further Study

Research the California trail across the plains to the West Coast. Draw a map of one of the major routes. Provide a mileage scale; highlight major natural formations that the pioneers might have seen along the way; mark major intersections and supply points; locate major tribes of Native Americans. Accompany this map with short diary excerpts from actual pioneers, to give a fuller understanding of the intensity of this trip.

Write a coming-of-age short story of a young girl or boy who must face a specific challenge that changes her or him forever. This could be written as fiction or taken from your own experience.

Shortly after writing *The Red Pony*, John Steinbeck left his hometown of Salinas, California, and moved to New York. Find out why Steinbeck became disgruntled about Salinas, and then write a story as if you were a local journalist covering his move to the East Coast.

The last chapter in *The Red Pony*, "The Leader of the People," centers a major portion of its action on the decaying haystack. Reread this chapter and find as many symbols as you can that are contained in the haystack and Jody's insistence in wanting to kill the mice that he finds there. How is the haystack connected to the grandfather? What is the significance of Jody wanting Grandfather to help him? Why do you think Steinbeck used the haystack in this chapter?

Pretend that you are Gitano from the chapter "The Great Mountains." Write a poem expressing your feelings as you ride up into the mountains with the old horse Easter. How would you relate to Easter? What would be your thoughts at being rejected by the Tiflins? Come up with your own interpretation of why Gitano took the horse and his sword and left without telling anyone.

Research how to raise a colt from birth to the point when a horse is old enough to be ridden. Write out a schedule, as if you were a trainer, for the steps to be taken at the appropriate ages of the horse to get it used to accepting a bridle through taking a saddle and being ridden. In your research, find out if this training has changed from the 1930s to the present time.

Compare and Contrast

1930s: Migrant farm workers, most of them coming north from Mexico, are subject to the dictates of the farm owners and suffer poor wages and working and living conditions. In 1936, some of them go on strike for better wages, employing a former colonel of the army to lead them. They are equipped with machine guns and steal red flags from a highway crew, threatening the residents of Salinas by telling them that a communist army is about to take over the city.

Today: Although working and living conditions still remain difficult for migrant workers, there are many support groups who have rallied for better wages, health facilities, and educational opportunities for those who work on California farms.

1930s: Salinas, California, is still mostly a cattle-raising land, with wheat and lettuce grown on some farms. The population of Salinas is about fifty thousand people.

Today: Salinas is known as the salad bowl of America, providing most of the states with salad greens. The population has increased to almost five hundred thousand people.

1930s: Steinbeck irritates most of the population of his hometown of Salinas by his proletariat views of workers' rights in his novels, such as *The Grapes of Wrath*. His books are burned in protest.

Today: The citizens of Salinas have constructed a huge Steinbeck Center, which draws an average of one hundred thousand visitors a year. The city is planning a three-year celebration for the one-hundredth birthday of Steinbeck.

What Do I Read Next?

Steinbeck wrote *The Pearl* (reissued in 2000) in a fable form, in which he relates the woes of a poor Mexican fisherman who finds a pearl one day and decides that it will change his life for the better. Unfortunately, the fisherman finds out that life is not so simple.

Coming-of-age stories abound, and some of the best were written by Ernest Hemingway. His stories about Nick Adams have been collected as *The Nick Adams Stories* (1981) and follow the development of the main character from childhood to adulthood.

In her book *Mona in the Promised Land* (reissued in 1997), Gish Jen writes her interpretation of adolescence, complicated by her Chinese-American teenager's decision to convert to Judaism.

The setting of William Saroyan's novel *The Human Comedy* (reissued in 1991) is wartime America, and its protagonist is a young boy who is determined to become the fastest deliverer of telegrams. What he does not foresee is the effect that the telegrams will have upon the receivers, as wartime brings news of many deaths.

Steinbeck's classic *The Grapes of Wrath* (reissued in 2002) was burned in his hometown because of its pro-labor elements. Most critics believe this was Steinbeck's greatest work.

In a more humorous vein, David Sedaris's discussion of childhood is contained in *Me Talk Pretty One Day* (2001), in which he gives his readers an insight into what life was like for him growing up in North Carolina.

Topics for Discussion

1. The name Jody gives his red pony, like many of the names in the book, proves important. Why does Jody choose Gabilan, a Spanish name?

2. The red pony was bought at the bankruptcy sale of a traveling carnival. Why is this important?

3. When the red pony dies, who does Jody blame? What is the significance of his childish anger?

4. The second story also concerns death, but this time focuses on the death of an old man. What does Gitano's dignified death demonstrate to Jody?

5. In the third story, why is it important that the birth of Jody's colt causes the death of the faithful mare?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Steinbeck assembled the stories that make up The Red Pony over several years. Show how the succession of stories broadens and deepens the meaning of the entire book.

2. The natural setting is very important in the sequence. Discuss the complex relationships between nature and human nature in the work.

3. Jody is the central character of The Red Pony, but his relationship with other characters forms his personality. Trace the pattern of character relationships in the book and show how they operate in Jody's maturation.

4. Show how the final section of The Red Pony opens the story sequence up to a more universal interpretation as a fable of America's lost youth and innocence, the loss of the American dream nurtured on the frontier.

5. What impact does Jody's grandfather have on the formation of his developing character?

Literary Precedents

The stories take place on the Tiflin ranch in the Salinas Valley, California.

Steinbeck's evocation of the vital beauty of the ranch setting matches his work in Of Mice and Men (1937), and his symbols grow naturally out of this setting. The setting stresses the end of the frontier and of the American drea m; in a sense Jody's maturation matches that of modern America. In its depiction of an American variation of a universal experience, The Red Pony deserves comparison with the finest of American fiction, especially initiation tales such as William Faulkner's The Bear (1942) or Ernest Hemingway's Nick Adams stories.

Further Study

Benson, Jackson J., *John Steinbeck, Writer: A Biography*, Penguin USA, 1990.

To better understand the writings of Steinbeck, it helps to understand his life, as much of the material of his books comes from his personal experience. Benson offers a comprehensive look into the life of Steinbeck.

Hill, Cherry, *The Formative Years: Raising and Training the Young Horse*, Breakthrough Publishing, 1988.

This definitive study of what it takes to raise a colt provides the information required to take on this task.

Steinbeck, John, *Working Days: The Journals of "The Grapes of Wrath," 1938-1941*, edited by Robert Demott, Penguin USA, 1990.

While creating the novel, Steinbeck kept a daily journal of his accomplishments and his frustrations. For an insider's look into the mind of an author, this book provides not only interesting background material for the novel but also a lesson for would-be writers.

Wallsten, Robert, ed., with Elaine Steinbeck, *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*, Viking, 1975.

Steinbeck was a prolific letter writer. This collection is the next best thing to an autobiography.

Bibliography

French, Warren, "Steinbeck, John," in *Reference Guide to American Literature*, 3d ed., edited by Jim Kamp, St. James Press, 1994.

Review of *The Grapes of Wrath & Other Writings, 1936-1941*, in *Library Journal*, September 1996.

Review of *Novels & Stories, 1932-1937*, in *Library Journal*, November 1, 1994.

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Novels for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

©1997-2002; ©2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc.

Gale and Design® and Thomson Learning™ are trademarks used herein under license.

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any

form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems—without the written permission of the publisher.

For permission to use material from this product, submit your request via Web at http://www.gale-edit.com/permissions, or you may download our Permissions Request form and submit your request by fax or mail to:

Permissions Department
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535

Permissions Hotline:
248-699-8006 or 800-877-4253, ext. 8006
Fax: 248-699-8074 or 800-762-4058

Since this page cannot legibly accommodate all copyright notices, the acknowledgments constitute an extension of the copyright notice.

While every effort has been made to secure permission to reprint material and to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, The Gale Group, Inc. does not guarantee the accuracy of the data contained herein. The Gale Group, Inc. accepts no payment for listing; and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Novels for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535