#### **SUMMING UP THE POEM**

- The speaker of the poem has a body that is like a rounded stone.
- Its head is like a short snake.

- The speaker can retract its head, and its legs come out of their sleeves.
- The speaker is always at home, traveling with its house.
- It floats on the lake and rests in the dust. Its flesh lives tenderly within.

## LITERARY COMPONENTS

Note the important furtherance of the existential and experiential world of this entity, living separate, in a shell, through the repeated use of the words *My* and *I*. The word *my* is used nine times; the word *I*, twice.

▶ Consonance; Alliteration: repetition of the s sound

▶ Metaphor: body a rounded stone, head a short snake, eyelids are clamps

▶ Rhyme: stone...bone, within...chin

Assonance: seams...sleeves, shrink within...chin,

eyelids...quick

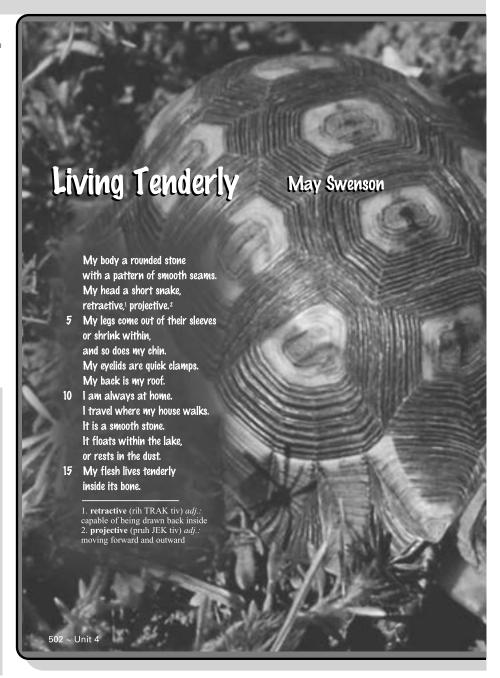
Alliteration: quick clamps
 Repetition: stone...smooth
 Alliteration: floats...flesh
 Consonance: rests...dust
 Assonance: rests...flesh

▶ Syllabification: In the last five lines, all the words are of one syllable, except for within and inside, which are compound prepositions that have the sound of two single-syllable words, and the three-syllable tenderly. This gives the word great importance.

### **ANALYZING THE POEM**

Living Tenderly is a beautifully written, careful poem. That it is a riddle poem is really secondary, an intellectual diversion. Living Tenderly gives us the inner mind of the turtle.

The turtle-speaker's observations and philosophy are basic, simple, and careful. This outlook makes sense for a creature that has been repeatedly slaughtered, and is now on the list of endangered species. The speaker's predominate use of monosyllables not only echoes its lumbering gait—its language is what we can expect from a being who dwells within a shell. Its body never has direct contact with the outside world, except for its feet. *Living Tenderly* is the experience of an encased entity that is encased and yet completely vulnerable, once its shell is broken. The tortoise always lives apart, even from its own kind, until it becomes dust.



### **GUIDING THE READING**

#### **LITERAL**

Q. What is the speaker's body like?

A. A rounded stone with a pattern of smooth seams.

Q. With what does the speaker compare its head?

A. A short snake.

Q. What is the speaker's roof?

A. The speaker's back is its roof.

# **ANALYTICAL**

Q. What (for humans) is unusual about the speaker's head?

A. Its head can be retracted and projected.

Q. What is unusual about the speaker's legs?

A. The speaker's legs come out or shrink within.