

How do we learn new things? One way is through the use of **similes**. Similes are comparisons that help us to deal with the unknown in terms of the known. In “Some Questions You Might Ask,” the poet Mary Oliver uses a simile in the form of a question to frame her poem about one of life’s most intriguing abstractions: the soul.

Read the poem, asking your own questions as you read. Write your questions and reflections in the **Response Notes** column.

Some Questions You Might Ask by Mary Oliver

Is the soul solid, like iron?
 Or is it tender and breakable, like
 the wings of a moth in the beak of the owl?
 Who has it, and who doesn't?
 I keep looking around me,
 The face of the moose is as sad
 as the face of Jesus.
 The swan opens her white wings slowly.
 In the fall, the black bear carries leaves into the darkness.
 One question leads to another.
 Does it have a shape? Like an iceberg?
 Like the eye of a hummingbird?
 Does it have one lung, like the snake and the scallop?
 Why should I have it, and not the anteater
 who loves her children?
 Why should I have it, and not the camel?
 Come to think of it, what about the maple trees?
 What about the blue iris?
 What about all the little stones, sitting alone in the moonlight?
 What about roses, and lemons, and their shining leaves?
 What about the grass? ❖

❖ Reread the poem, this time looking carefully at all the comparisons Oliver makes between the soul, or some aspect of the soul, and familiar objects. Notice that Oliver makes a number of direct connections using the words *like* or *as*, which often indicate a simile.

Response
Notes

*Do I know for sure
that I have a soul?*

