Understanding Poetry

Read the following poem, *Spellbound* by Emily Brontë. It might help you to understand it if you read it aloud.

**Spellbound**

by Emily Brontë

The night is darkening round me,
The wild winds coldly blow;
But a tyrant spell has bound me
And I cannot, cannot go.

The giant trees are bending
Their bare boughs weighed with snow.
And the storm is fast descending,
And yet I cannot go.

Clouds beyond clouds above me,
Wastes beyond wastes below;
But nothing drear can move me;
I will not, cannot go.

When you have read the poem, look at the questions below, which will help you to understand some of the language and poetic techniques.
1 Look at the two lists below of ‘Words’ and ‘Meanings’.

Match the words on the left with the correct meanings on the right. Use a dictionary to check your answers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wild</td>
<td>a powerful influence on someone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a tyrant</td>
<td>to limit what someone is allowed to do by making them obey a rule or agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a spell</td>
<td>when trees or areas of land have nothing growing on them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to bind (bound)</td>
<td>a big branch on a tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>giant</td>
<td>stormy, with strong winds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bare</td>
<td>past a place or outside an area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a bough</td>
<td>large areas of empty land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to descend</td>
<td>extremely large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beyond</td>
<td>making you feel bored or unhappy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wastes</td>
<td>someone who rules a country in a cruel and unfair way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drear</td>
<td>to become lower/come nearer to the ground</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 Can you find examples of these poetic techniques in the poem? Underline them.

- **alliteration** (using words that start with the same sound, e.g. *silver sky*)
- **assonance** (using words that have the same vowel sound, e.g. *white night*)
- **repetition** (using the same word more than once)

3 We can describe the rhyming patterns in a poem by using the letters A, B and C. The rhyming pattern for the following 4-line verse can be shown as AABA. The first two and the last lines all rhyme and so are all described as ‘A’:

   He stood there softly at the door, (A)
   I saw the smile he wore. (A)
   He called my name, I turned to go, (B)
   I could not stay for more. (A)

Look back at the poem *Spellbound* and choose which of the rhyming patterns below is used:

- a ABAB
- b ABCB
- c ABBA
4 Answer the following questions:
   a Describe the mood, or tone, of the poem *Spellbound*, using words from the box if you wish.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sad</th>
<th>happy</th>
<th>thoughtful</th>
<th>brave</th>
<th>strong-minded</th>
<th>threatening</th>
<th>angry</th>
<th>frightening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

   a Do you like the poem?

   b Why do you think the person in the poem ‘cannot go’?

   c Who or what do you think has cast a ‘tyrant spell’ on the person in the poem?