1. What stands out most strongly in the story; what do you like best? (Dialogue, a particular character, description, imagery, sense of setting, etc.) And, why? What do you like about the way it affects you?

2. What in the story seemed surprisingly truthful to you? What is confusing to you; what didn’t you understand? (This could be as small as a line or a word, or an action a character takes.) Don’t be shy. There are no stupid questions. Caution: is the confusion artful irony or vague ambiguity?

3. Is the story’s central conflict clear? Is there an external conflict (having to do with events, actions, the plot)? And is there an internal conflict (having to do with a character’s feelings)?

4. Is the conflict simplistic, or too easily or melodramatically resolved (morals at the end of a story, obvious lessons learned)? Is it ultimately an action-driven story or a character-driven story, and what is the effect of that drive? How effective is the resolution?

5. How does the story’s structure contribute to (or detract from) its emotional effect?

6. What mysteries /questions arise in the story, and how are these mysteries resolved or answered? If any are left unresolved or unanswered, is this a problem or a virtue in the story? Should more mystery/intrigue or questions be developed?

7. What are the central ironies in the story? Are they sufficiently cultivated?

8. What subtexts arise in the dialogue and actions of the characters? What has been left effectively unsaid? What’s missing? Is a subtext present, and is it sufficiently suggestive or deep enough?

9. What is the effect of the chosen point of view? How does it matter? In what ways does the POV manipulate the reader’s emotional relationship with the story? Is this manipulation evident or effective?

10. What risks in form or content is the author taking? Are these risks effective? If not, what might the author do to make them more effective?

11. Are there elements of the story or the writing that are too conventional—familiar to the point that the reader disengages emotionally? What are these elements and how might they be defamiliarized?

12. What scenes happened too quickly, or too slowly? (i.e., were there some scenes that seemed to go on too long, or scenes where you wanted to spend more time with the characters?)

13. Did the characters seem sufficiently developed, original, complex like real people, or are they sometimes a little stereotypical, one-dimensional, predictable?

14. How effective is the story’s voice or sense of atmosphere? Where does it come from and how does it function?

Or

1. 'This story is about…' Sum up what you think the story is about in one line. Some people do headlines.

2. 'The strongest part of this story is…'

3. 'The weakest part of this story is…'

4. 'One suggestion for revising this story is…'