

Reading Guide for *The Phantom Limbs of the Rollow Sisters* by Timothy Schaffert

About the Book

“...blithe, quirky...spirited, offbeat...” – Janet Maslin, **The New York Times**

“...boondocks-Gothic...quietly tragic...The sisters lose their childhood innocence only to acquire an adult version... As long as the sisters have each other, nothing else matters.” – **The Washington Post**

Renowned author Timothy Schaffert’s celebrated debut novel chronicles two sisters on the cusp of womanhood as they struggle to understand their father’s suicide as well their mother’s abandonment of them many years earlier. On graduating from high school, the sisters are once again set adrift, this time by their grandmother who leaves them for Florida. In order to survive, and perhaps even thrive, on their path to adulthood, they must learn to reconcile their pasts and discover how to depend upon themselves as well as on each other.

In a story that rises out of the spare Nebraska landscape, Schaffert delivers a redemptive tale about two young women searching for wholeness and love.

About the Author

TIMOTHY SCHAFFERT is the award-winning author of two previous novels: *The Phantom Limbs of the Rollow Sisters* and *The Singing and Dancing Daughters of God*. He lives in Nebraska, where he is the director of the (Downtown) Omaha Lit Fest and a contributing editor for the *Prairie Schooner* literary journal.

Questions for Discussion

1. What do you think Lily and Mabel most need?
2. What do you think the ending of the novel means for them?
3. Much of this novel focuses on grief and surviving grief. Do you think, though, that it is a sad book?
4. The girls live in an isolated, rural area, and they run an antique/second hand shop. How do these places affect the story? How does Schaffert use setting to advance the tale?
5. How are men portrayed in this novel? How are families?
6. How does this novel change your perspective about Nebraska? Are books that offer perspective or challenge assumptions the kinds of books you prefer to read?

7. Why do you think Mabel starts going by the name Mabel?
8. When Lily finally meets her mother, Fiona tells Lily what Lily wants to hear about why they were abandoned. When she meets Ana, she learns the truth about her father's death. How do these scenes change the story? Is the truth what Lily really wanted?
9. Why does the story of Charlie Starkweather and Caril Ann Fugate hold such continued interest for us, and what does this say about Middle America?
10. Though they end up together once more, in what ways have their journeys differed and how does their resilience offer hope for the future and a sense of redemption?
11. In some ways this story is a search for belonging. In what differing ways are the girls able to find acceptance of the past and how does that effect their capacity for normal human relations?