

# READING GROUP GUIDE

## Keep Your Mouth Shut and Wear Beige

By Kathleen Gilles Seidel

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### About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Keep Your Mouth Shut and Wear Beige* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Keep Your Mouth Shut and Wear Beige*.

### About the Book

*The best advice for the mother of the groom? Keep your mouth shut and wear beige!*

“It’s bad enough when two mothers plan an event as fraught as a wedding, but what happens when the ex-husband’s new girlfriend elbows her way in? *Keep Your Mouth Shut and Wear Beige* adds the mother of the groom to literature’s rich collection of long-suffering women. When Seidel’s heroine refuses to suffer in silence, the results are both poignant and hilarious.”

---Debra Galant, author of *Rattled and Fear* and *Yoga in New Jersey*

Darcy Van Aiken is doing just fine, thank you. She’s an ICU nurse with an “amicable” divorce from her ex-husband, Mike, two great kids, and a prescription for Ritalin. Then her older son, Jeremy, gets engaged to Cami Zander-Brown---daughter of a wealthy New York family---and her world gets turned upside down. The source of her trouble, much to Darcy’s surprise, is not in the form of Rose Zander-Brown, Cami’s elegant and accomplished mother. Nor is it in the form of Guy Zander-Brown, Cami’s charismatic and wildly successful literary agent father. Instead, lurking in the shadows of Mike’s new life is the beautifully dressed Claudia, a self-described “managed perfectionist.”



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The Zander-Browns have money. Lots of money. The plans for their daughter's dream wedding grow more fabulous by the day, and loving every minute is Claudia. With her perfect taste, Claudia can't help thinking she would make a much better mother of the groom than Darcy. This wedding is her chance to entrench herself in Mike's life---and take credit for the two sons Darcy has worked so hard to raise right.

It's a battle of will and wits. What Darcy learns about herself---and about family and friendship--makes for a delicious, hilarious, touching read.

## About the Author

Recently widowed after thirty-five years of marriage, Kathleen Gilles Seidel has two daughters and lives in Virginia. She has a Ph.D. in English literature from the Johns Hopkins University.

## Discussion Questions

1. Darcy Van Aiken narrates this novel. How does a first-person narrator color your impression of her husband, Mike? Of Rose? Of Claudia? Of Darcy herself? What would the novel have been like had Rose narrated it?
2. The novel explores, at some length, children's health. How do Finney's physical and developmental issues affect those around him? Zack's? Annie's?
3. *Keep Your Mouth Shut and Wear Beige*, like all comedies, begins with a society somehow in disarray. What is out of place or out of balance at the book's beginning for the Van Aiken family? For the Zander-Browns? For Claudia? How do these issues resolve? Does the resolution seem realistic?
4. Darcy's considerable abilities and virtues are exhibited in this novel. But in the universe of this novel, even the least likable character has some good qualities. What virtues does Claudia exhibit?
5. At the heart of many comedies is a courtship between a man and a woman, ending in marriage. At the heart of this one, is a pair of women who bond as friends as they are in the process of becoming in-laws. What are the barriers they must surmount to become friends?
6. The book alludes to the story of Mary and Martha (p. 107). Of Rose and Darcy, which is which? Which is Claudia? Can this distinction be applied to the men in the book?
7. Arrange the main characters by how much money they have. How does money, or its lack, drive them? The novel avoids easy categories—money, in this book, is not the root of all evil. How does having it help? How is having it a burden?



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8. The book explores the idea of beauty as well. Think about Claudia and Annie. What effect does beauty—possessing it or pursuing it through creating it—have on their lives?

9. Family life is much in evidence—at one point the novel refers to "typical family chaos" (78). Is all family chaos created equal, or is every family chaotic in its own way?

10. Darcy Van Aiken admits that she needs to "face what I was going to do with the rest of my life" (262). To what extent do other characters create or recreate themselves in the course of the novel.

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