**Component 4: Prose Study**

**CANDIDATE D: Band 3**

**‘Both novels portray females as powerful. In Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* and Sue Monk Kidd’s *The Secret Life of Bees*, women break the boundaries put on them by society and, as a result, they defy female stereotypes of the time.’ With this statement in mind, compare and contrast the ways in which both authors present the development of female power. In the course of your writing, make it clear how your interpretation of the texts has been influenced by other readers’ views as well as by consideration of relevant contexts.**

**Wording of task**

* There are useful steers toward all the AOs in the wording of the task, as the candidate has made use of a question stem recommended in WJEC/EDUQAS guidance.
* The use of a critical opinion can help the candidate focus and structure a clear argument. However, the view here invites a focus on context rather than critical appreciation; the mention of ‘women’, ‘society’ and ‘female stereotypes’ encourages the candidate to view the characters as examples of prevailing social attitudes and leads her away from a solidly literary appreciation of the texts.
* The task could have been tweaked to elicit a stronger literary approach for AO2, helping the candidate to focus on the characters as crafted constructs used to convey theme and meaning, and to invite some debate for AO5:
* ‘The female characters are so saintly in their suffering that we find it hard to feel any real sympathy for them.’ With this view in mind, compare and contrast the ways in which the writers present female endurance.
* ‘After reading both novels it’s impossible to avoid the simple response that “all men stink” and we should condemn them outright.’ Compare and contrast the ways in which the writers present the male characters as unsympathetic.
* There is clear ground for comparison between the texts in the focus on gender issues and female oppression/emancipation with scope to make worthwhile connections to the ways in which the context of the Deep South, in different historical eras, has affected the writers’ choices. However, Kidd’s novel perhaps lacks sufficient literary merit; it has a strong narrative drive but the candidate has tended to focus on character and plot rather than detailed literary analysis.

**AO1: Mid/High Band 3 – 11 marks**

* There is ***some clear engagement*** with the texts as literary works, rather than simply good stories, with ***mostly relevant*** material. The candidate generally stays well-focused on the task of female empowerment.
* There is ***some sensible use of concepts*** but ***relatively sparse use of technical terminology*** in the tendency to give commentary of meaning rather than to engage with technique.
* This is a ***coherent response***, with ***clear organisation*** ***and generally accurate expression*** despite a ***few lapses.***
* Most Band 3 criteria are met, therefore, as this is a clear and sensible response without the sound, secure knowledge and understanding of either text needed to move into Band 4, even at the lower end.

 **AO2: Low Band 3 – 9 marks**

* There is ***relatively limited analysis of technique*** and engagement with the craft of the writer which affects the candidate’s performance in this crucial AO. Instead of discussing in detail how the writers’ use language, structure and other prose devices to present their characters and link them to over-arching themes, the candidate tends to give **broad commentary of meaning, verging perilously close to narrative** and telling the story at times (lines 124 – 128; 159 – 175 etc). This is perhaps exacerbated by the relative lack of literary ‘heft’ in *The Secret Life of Bees* which makes detailed technical analysis more difficult.
* There is a tendency to discuss the characters as if they are **real people** and it is noticeable how rarely the candidate refers directly to the writers behind their constructs.
* There is some assertion as the ***textual support is also relatively sparse*** suggesting the candidates’ knowledge of the novels could be more secure. This would allow her to range more freely, rather than relying on a few key sections, such as the opening pages of *The Color Purple.* More direct quotation in support of claims would have given opportunities to demonstrate more detailed, purposeful analysis of language choices and devices.
* There is some brief discussion of key words but this is not sustained and ideas are not fully developed (lines 44; 61-3; 73-4; 111-5; 139-40).
* Although there is more commentary than analysis, there is evidence of ***relatively clear grasp of implicit meaning*** and overview.

**AO3: Mid Band 5 – 11 marks**

* The candidate shows a ***clear grasp of the importance of social and historical context*** in both texts and the importance of gender and, to some extent, racial politics in shaping the characters.
* However, the context is **very broad and generalised or conflated** (as in lines 64-7; 104-9) and, while the different eras are briefly mentioned, opportunities to explore precise distinctions are not taken up.
* As perhaps encouraged by the task, there is a tendency to let context lead at times, so that the characters are viewed as examples of social attitudes towards women at the approximate times of writing. It is noticeable the candidate often begins or ends a paragraph with contextual material instead of returning to the text to show really clear understanding of the relationship between text and context (20-5; 64-7; 104-9). The contextual material often appears as rather long ‘chunks’, sometimes divorced from the texts as in lines 45 to 50, rather than being securely integrated into a literary discussion of them.

**AO4: Mid Band 3 – 6 marks**

* There are ***generally clear and appropriate links*** between the texts as in the comparisons between the protagonists’ escape from male abuse and Celie’s independence in forming her own business and the Boatwrights’ honey-making enterprise.
* However, these are not well-supported with textual details, and opportunities to develop similarities and differences, addressing AOs 2 and 4, are not exploited. Some links, such as the comparison between August and Nettie in line 153 to 159, are valid but assertive as there is not enough support or detail to make them convincing or secure.
* Once again, there is a sense that the candidate’s knowledge of the texts was not strong enough to move beyond **clear outlines of connections** here.

**AO5: Mid Band 3 – 6 marks**

* There is **some clear and appropriate use of other critical readings**, although these are rather thin on the ground.
* The bibliography clealyr demonstrates an **over-reliance on web-based study sites** such as Sparknotes, Shmoop, litcharts and Cliffsnotes which has not helped the candidate here. Instead, this kind of study aid has led to a relatively simple, straightforward emphasis on character and plot and the candidate has adopted a similar commentary-approach, rather than engaging with more challenging, analytical views of the texts. While such material might be more difficult to find in relation to Kidd’s novel, there is a wealth of worthwhile literary criticism of Walker’s more established work which could have been applied to both texts, addressing AOs 4 and 5 simultaneously.
* The candidate gives her own views at times but these remain assertive as they are not fully developed (74-85).

**TOTAL MARKS: 43**