**The following material is intended to support teachers in their marking and understanding of the expectations of the NEA task. You are encouraged to use it for departmental standardisation purposes. However, the material must not be shared with candidates, under any circumstance.**

**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.**

**AO1/4** Clear, appropriate focus on task and outlines some broad connections.

In both novels studied, the female protagonists, Celie (Walker’s *The Color Purple*) and Lily (Kidd’s *The Secret Life of Bees*), show characteristics of women who had to live according to social expectations; for example, both are dominated by men at various points in the novels and both experience physical and emotional abuse at the hands of the dominant men in their lives. During the time each novel is set, women had very little say in society and were expected to stay at home, have children and be good home-makers. However, both Celie and Lily progress from these roles into powerful independent women; they defy limited expectations placed upon them by society and each character develops to become valued as an independent women suggesting a hope to change how society sees women.

**AO3** Clear but general and broad reference to social context

In Walkers’ epistolary, *The Color Purple*, set between 1910 and 1940, a majority of female characters stand up for their rights, despite living in a patriarchal society. As a woman, living in this era, it was common to suffer physical violence if she refused to do what a man asked of her; this was a man’s way of showing a woman who was more dominant. We see this through Celie. The quote ‘You better not never tell nobody but God. It’d kill your mammy’ highlights the physical abuse that Celie suffered from Pa from a very early age. Celie finds the only solution to deal with this abuse is to write to God so narrates *The Color Purple* through a series of letters (mostly) addressed to God. The letters are the only way that Celie can express herself; God becomes the only ‘male’ that she can trust. However, when she gets older, ‘Dear God’ becomes ‘Dear Nettie’. This could suggest a growing distrust that she now has for God as each time she confided in him, God had let her down.

**AO2** Gives some brief support. Some clear grasp of implicit meaning. Not enough development of point to make sound.

**AO3** Makes link between text and social context but quite generalised. Clear rather than sound.

However, we also see female characters reject this treatment, and even Celie, who is the victim of both physical and emotional abuse, eventually finds independence and freedom through letting go of the expectations society has of her. Similarly, in Kidd’s *The Secret Life of Bees*, set in 1964, the year of the civil rights movement, the female characters reject the roles expected of them in terms of marriage and education. In the 1960s, men dominated all aspects of life, especially the work place, meaning that women relied on marriage and children in order to make a life for themselves. However, there was a sense of change in the 1960s, as women realised they wanted more from life. This change can be seen in the Boatwright sisters who own their own honey making business, ‘Nobody around here had ever seen a lady beekeeper till her.’ This highlights the change that the 1960s saw for women. The phrase ‘had ever’ suggests that this had been a first for the whole of Tiburon and even the whole state of South Carolina. Such changes began to take place when birth control pills were introduced in 1960; this meant that women now had the freedom to enter the workplace and have children later in life. Betty Friedan’s book ‘The Feminine Mystique’ (1963) challenged traditional roles of women in the 1960s which is reflected in Kidd’s novel: August decides against marriage and pursues a career in honey-making; furthermore, Deborah rejects her role as a mother temporarily in order to look after herself.

**AO2** Simple comment on use of language. Valid

**AO4** Link remains valid but assertive here as not developed or supported

**AO3** Broad, generalised contextual link with some support

**AO3** Attempts link with social context but generalised and somewhat weak textual evidence.

**AO1** Simple focus on task

Celie, in *The Color Purple*, shows a character who is initially the opposite of female power; however, through time she progresses into somebody who is strong. The introduction of Celie at the start of the novel, when she is just 14 years old, shows the reader that she is oppressed by the person who she believes is her father. This can be seen immediately in one of the novel’s opening lines: ‘You gonna do what your mammy wouldn’t. First he put his thing up against my hip and sort of wiggle it around. Then he grab hold of my titties. Then he push his thing inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying ‘You better shut up and git used to it.’ This quote demonstrates Pa’s power over Celie and what he does to her. It also demonstrates Celie’s naivety as she describes Pa’s penis as a ‘thing’. Her description of Pa’s genitals could also show her lack of education. It was very uncommon for black children, especially black girls, to have an education. Often, black children were taken out of school before the third grade; whilst young girls helped their mothers with housework, young boys assisted their fathers with manual labour.

**AO3** Refers to generalised context without returning to *TCP* to demonstrate sound appreciation of significance on text.

**AO2** Quotes evidence from novel’s opening with some brief discussion of language choice and implied meaning

Celie is raped by Pa behind her mother’s back whilst she is dying. The quote ‘You gonna do what your mammy wouldn’t’ shows Pa using Celie to satisfy his sexual urges because his wife has refused. Celie is powerless to him at this stage, showing the position that many young, black women found themselves in during this era. The violence of these attacks is highlighted by verbs such as ‘grab’, ‘push’ and ‘choke’. As a young woman living in the early 1900’s, Celie is expected to follow the social expectations of women set by the man of the house. Furthermore, due to Celie’s passive nature, she is socially dependant on and dominated by men and, due the suffering she endures at the hands of men, she is unable to form any meaningful heterosexual relationships. The control men have over her makes heterosexual bonds difficult for her to cultivate and encourages her homosociality. One critic supports this idea in saying, ‘Celie is unable to bond with these males because of the position of power that they are in; she is dependent on men to provide for her and is dominated as a result of her dependence.’ This statement is accurate: Celie is abused both mentally and physically by ‘Pa’ yet remains completely dependent on him. It is only when Celie meets Shug and explores her sexuality does she realise she can become independent of men.

**AO5** Gives own unsupported (thus assertive) interpretation. Makes clear and appropriate use of relevant critical view.

**AO3/1** Broad context linked to assertive claims about character as not developed or supported

**AO2** Quotes same phrase as earlier. Some further discussion of language choice

In contrast to Celie, Lily is a stronger character. This novel also starts with the character aged 14, but she is seen as more outgoing than Celie; this could be due to racial differences between the girls. As Lily is white, she isn’t as restricted as Celie is; Celie is treated differently as she is black which has an effect on her confidence – she believes that she is unable to achieve due to her own expectations. Lily, on the other hand, has higher expectations for life, perhaps because she is white. Lily was born when there was still racial tensions in America which makes it easier for Lily to have a future and (limited) freedom. Lily decides that she is going to run away from her father as she believe he doesn’t love her because of the death of her mother. In some ways, it seems she had to mature quicker than most 14 year olds. For example, she has to accept that the death of her mother was her fault. This can be seen in the quote: ‘Just put it out of your head, Lily. It was an accident. You didn’t mean to do it.’ This quote suggests that although she was the one who pulled the trigger, she couldn’t be the one to blame as she was four years old. This accident still haunts Lily; Rosaleen still has to reassure her ‘Just put it out of your head.’ Her situation is like Celie’s in that she too loses her mother. Both characters experience the death of a loved one which could contribute to them becoming (eventually) more independent. During the era the novels are set, the women was usually the one who stayed at home with the children and, often, young girls learnt from their mothers; however, as Celie and Lily lost their mothers at a young age, they would have had to take over the role of the mother in their own houses, especially Celie as she was the eldest and had to look after her brothers and sisters.

**AO4/3** Clear comparison linked briefly to broad but relevant context.

**AO4** Asserted link weakened by lack of textual support

**AO2** Refers to text and gives brief support but this is commentary of broad meaning rather than analysis of technique. Veers close to narrative here.

**AO4** Again, link only valid as not clearly supported

**AO5/4** Links both texts to rather generalised context

**AO4/2** Valid link with some support and discussion of language, although tendency to write about characters as if they’re real people with limited sense of writer’s conscious crafting

Lily seems to be emotionally stronger than Celie as she is able to stand up for herself and fight back; she often gets into arguments and is punished severely for this behaviour, ‘He poured a mound of grits the size of an anthill onto the pine floor. Get over here and kneel down’. This suggests that, like Pa, T-Ray also uses violence as a punishment. The words ‘kneel down’ suggest that Lily’ father wants to position himself physically higher than her so she has to look up to him; this conveys control and authority over Lily. According to Cliffsnotes, ‘Lily’s father has no respect for women (or children) ad he regularly teaches Lily to be a victim’. This form of abuse is also seen in *The Color Purple*. Both fathers are seen to physically abuse their children, ‘He beat me today cause he say I winked at a boy in church.’ Celie’s father controls her in all aspects of her life but Celie has a different reaction to Lily’s: Celie accepts the abuse from her father, ‘But I don’t never git used to it’. Another critic noted that ‘Celie just tries to stay alive after the abuses, because she doesn’t know how to fight with the man around her.’ This supports the idea that she is weak around the men who dominate her. On the other hand, Lily doesn’t accept this abuse; in fact, she makes the decision to run away with her black nanny Rosaleen. Lily makes her decision carefully and is aware of the consequences that she may face in the near future, ‘I understood that a new rooftop would do wonders for me.’ This suggests that she realises that she deserves better treatment than what her father is giving her.

**AO2** Some support and grasp of implied meaning.

**AO5** Makes clear use of another view.

**AO5** Quotes another reading, ie simple commentary from online study site.

Shug from *The Color Purple*, is the first person we meet that defies social expectations at the same time the novel is set. For example, we learn that Shug has children who she doesn’t look after, ‘My kids with they grandma, she say. She could stand the kids, I had to go.’ She hardly sees them as she is too busy living her life, doing the things that she wants to do rather than what society expects her to do. This attitude can also be seen in Deborah from *The Secret Life of Bees.* Both mothers leave their own children with other family members whilst they both sort their lives out. Shug also defies social expectations in that she does not allow any man to dominate her. Shug is confident and knows exactly what she wants from life. In the novel, we learn that Shug is Mr\_’s love interest, ‘I for what you call a passion for him.’ The noun ‘passion’ suggests that it isn’t a real ‘love’ for her, rather lust. Shug is in total control of her relationship with Mr\_; she tells him what to do and he does it. The way that she acts, reminds the reader very much of the way a typical male acted during this time and we see a role-reversal.

**AO1/2/3** Valid example with some support and appropriate link but writes about characters as if real people rather than literary constructs crafted by writers.

**AO2** Some support and attempt at discussion of key words – not fully convincing. Somewhat assertive and more overview/commentary than detailed analysis of how character is presented and why.

Lily becomes a stronger, mature person who, with the help of the Boatwright sisters, experiences a free life where she has more control over what she wants in life than before. Lily bonds with the three sisters who all teach her different things: August Boatwright is the sister that she becomes closest to and she teaches Lily that everybody is equal to one another, ‘There was no difference between my piss and June’s. That’s what I thought when I looked at the dark circle on the ground. Piss was piss.’ Lily realises that all races are equal; however, she doesn’t realise this until she stays with the Boatwright sisters for a long period of time. She realises that if she is to become strong, like August, there must be a unity in all religions, races and ages. This character can also be compared to Nettie in *The Color Purple*. Like August, she also has the ambition to have a career ‘I want her to git some more schooling. Make a schoolteacher out of her.’ Like August, Nettie also explores different options in her life: she aims to become a teacher; however, she eventually travels to Africa and becomes a missionary, something that without Celie’s own sacrifices wouldn’t have been possible.

**AO4** Clear link but not developed so as to make sound.

**AO2** Simple commentary with support. Shows some knowledge and understanding but assertive rather than analytical

With August’s help, Lily realises that she doesn’t need her father to be happy as long as she has people she loves around her. Lily also becomes a stronger person spiritually through the character of May. Although May is mentally ill, she uses religion as her guide to become a stronger-willed. The connection that Lily has with ‘Black Mary’ gives her the hope and guidance that she needs to become that stronger-willed person that she desperately wants to be, ‘I called to the Lady of Chains, that’s the last thing I remember. Her name echoing through the empty spaces.’ Lily feels passionate about the ‘Black Mary’ which is perhaps the first thing that she is passionate about in her life. It also suggests that she feels she can relate to the Lady of Chains as he believed that she was trapped (in chains) whilst at home with her father. Although Lily and June do not get along with each other at first, Lily also learns lessons from her. For example, June also decides that she does not want to marry until she is ready to do so; she doesn’t want to be tied down to a man, she is strong-willed and she hides her feelings from everybody who loves her. All of these character traits that Lily is shown, changes her; she becomes somebody who develops a sense of belonging to a community instead of feeling lost in her own home. This is like Celie, who develops into somebody who is completely independent of men. Like the Boatwright sisters, Celie also creates her own business which highlights her newfound independence away from Pa and Mr\_. She now has the freedom to create something that is hers and something that makes her happy. It can be seen that both Lily and Celie learn from other people’s experiences to become better people: Lily learns from the Boatwright sisters as well as Rosaleen, whilst Celie learns from Shug and her sister, Nettie.

**AO1/4** Returns to outline of main argument and attempts link to generalised themes of texts with loose connection between the two. Sensible but not enough support and development to demonstrate informed, knowledgeable critical response.

**AO2** Simple commentary with occasional support. Shows some knowledge and understanding but assertive rather than analytical

**AO4** Valid link but not supported or developed.

In *The Color Purple*, the majority of female characters are dominated by men; however, this novel explore the journeys of some of these women who mature and grow, and eventually become free of the men’s oppression. Celie, for example, becomes an independent business women by the end of the novel; she, eventually, rejects traditional roles placed on women by society and creates a sense of belonging for herself.  This shows that if one person is courageous enough to believe that they deserve better, it can be possible for them to start a new story. Walker give Celie a voice in order to show women that it is possible to start a new and better life without the assistance of men. Similarly, *The Secret Life of Bees* also highlights a change in female power. Before meeting August, Lily does not consider life without men; August teaches her that it is her choice as to whether wants to be part of a man’s life or not, something that August decided wasn’t for her. Lily learns the power of female solidarity through August’s life lessons and learns from the Boatwright sisters that society’s expectations of females can be broken.

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