

A Unit on Learning How to Add Discipline Into Writing

Osayimwense Osa

Materials: Marama Ba's So long a Letter and "so long a letter" in MLK's in "Letter from Birmingham Jail" and the epistolary novel.

The aim of this teaching unit is to illustrate the meaning of the Epistolary novel or writing using the Senegalese novel, *Ba's So long a Letter* and MLK's in "Letter from Birmingham Jail" and the need to write with more care and discipline letters beyond emails.

Definition of Epistolary

Epistolary is a Greek word, *epistolē*, meaning a "letter." Epistolary is a literary [genre](#) pertaining to letters, in which writers use letters, journals, and diary entries in their works, or they tell their stories or deliver messages through a series of letters. Though the usual format of epistolary is letters, writers sometimes use other forms of document such as newspaper clippings and diary entries. Recently, writers also use electronic documents like emails, blogs, radio broadcast, and recordings (<https://literarydevices.net/epistolary>).

The Senegalese novel, *So Long a Letter* is an epistolary novel, and King's *Letter from Birmingham Jail* is also one that belongs to the epistolary genre.

At the end of this unit:

- Students will know how to write friendly and formal letters beside what they do in emails.
- Students will learn about letter writing and its purpose the old fashioned way.
- Students will know that there is more discipline in letter writing than in email, and learn to apply that discipline in writing essays.

Assignments:

1. What is the significance of "so long a letter" in MLK's in "Letter from Birmingham Jail"
2. Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple*, is an epistolary novel in which an impoverished black teenage girl, Celie, tells her story through writing letters to both her sister and God. Here, readers can learn about the difficult life of Celie through her words and the direct experiences she

has faced. Alice Walker has chosen to let the readers encounter this story by using Celie's [voice](#), providing Celie a power that she could not have in everyday life. However, in the film adaptation of this novel, these letters echoed through the monologues of characters. Discuss and feel free to use <https://literarydevices.net/epistolary>) as a guide etc.