The author and English literature professor, David Lodge, defines epistolary writing as a first person narrative written as a series of documents of ongoing events (Lodge, 1992). While rare and unique, this style can shape how the narrative is conveyed and can manipulate how the narrative is received by changing the narrator’s point of view and medium. Alice Walker’s award-winning “The Color Purple” is a well-known example of this writing form, narrated as a series of letters written to God which details Celie’s, the protagonist, struggle in life (Walker, 1982). This use of epistolary shows that the character is poorly educated, which adds a sense of realism to the story. The author is able to write poorly spelt words, spelt phonemically instead of how they are written which is rarely acceptable in other forms of writing. Yet this is effective in this form as it establishes a real sense of low-educated, low socio-economical status by showing it rather than describing it.

Additionally, being letters to God allows the character to reveal real emotion and truths where the reader can view these as a firsthand account into the protagonist’s life which she would not be able to vocalise if in a third person, non-epistolary form. Furthermore, the letters seem like the author is communicating directly to the reader in a natural form, like real letters that the reader is stumbling upon. Lodge describes this point well in “the Art of Fiction” (1992) by quoting -- ‘Its [writing’s] representation of speech, and still more of non-verbal events, is highly artificial. But a fictional letter is indistinguishable from a real letter’. Thus reading this letter, although fictional, is just as real as reading a letter from a family member hereby making the conversation seem more real.

Lastly, as everything is written as a conversation, any description of the scene or object must also be explained like they would if it were you conversing, or left open to the interpretation and imagination of the reader. Therefore, the narrator is entirely in control of details that shine through the story which may affect how the audience receives it.

References:

Walker, A. (1982). *The color purple*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Lodge, D. 1992 ‘The Epistolary Novel (Michael Frayn)’ in *The Art of Fiction*, Viking, New York: pp. 21 - 24