

To the letter...

In the age of email, Instagram and Twitter, letter-writing is a lot less common than it used to be. But letters can be a lifeline for people in prison so let's celebrate them.

Here's part of a letter written over 500 years ago by Richard Calle to his wife Margery Paston in 1469. Because he is only a bailiff, her parents have separated them:

'I beseech Almighty God to comfort us as soon as it pleases Him, for we who ought of very right to be most together are most asunder; it seems a thousand years ago since I spoke with you. I had rather be with you than have all the goods in the world.'

And a more recent one left on a kitchen table:

Husband,

Welcome home. I'm hiding in the house with a nerf gun. Here is the other one...

The loser cooks dinner tonight. May the odds be ever in your favour.

Wife XoXo



Curiously perhaps, lots of people still write letters to newspapers. Here are a few little gems sent to the Daily Telegraph:

SIR – I've often wondered whether Britain's education system is in a state of decline. Then I visited Google and started to type, 'Can I get...'. Before I finished my query the first suggested search in the drop-down list appeared: 'Can I get pregnant from a dog?'. Now I know.

SIR – My first thought on seeing your headline, 'Pupils to be taught about sex at seven' was, 'What, in the morning?'

SIR – 'It's a wake-up call'. That's what politicians say after every terrorist outrage. So who are these security experts who need to be woken up on a regular basis? Are they all teenagers who can't bear to get out of bed before three in the afternoon?

And one to raise a smile:

Lucy was scribbling furiously over a piece of paper when her mother asked her what she was drawing. 'I'M not drawing, Mum, I'm writing a letter to Jason.' 'But you can't write', her Mum pointed out. 'That's ok,' said Lucy, 'Jason can't read'.

Now for some bad letter riddles and puns:

Have you ever seen a duchess?

Yes – it's the same as an English 's'

Which two letters are bad for your teeth?

D K

What 8-letter word has one letter in it?

Envelope

Which two letters of the alphabet are nothing?

M T

Poem of the week

Letter

Hugh McMillan

Here is a letter
come across the ocean
over the back of a world
curved like a whale.
I unwrap it, like tissue,
and sentences spill out,
as though the seal on a jar has broken,
coils of cornflower blue
on paper thin as shell.

I saw a sailor's valentine once
in a museum in Nantucket Sound,
a mosaic of broken scallop
glued in a compass rose.
'Writ from the heart' it said.
Words come best like that:
in ink or blood,
when the source is from a major vein.

I read, and understand this much:
If ink sees off time and miles, then so must love.

Epistolary novels are written in the form of letters. Match the titles of these epistolary novels with the descriptions:

1. Letters to God and others from a young black girl growing up in the American South
2. Letters from a senior demon to his nephew Wormwood, a Junior Tempter, about how to destroy a man referred to as 'the Patient'
3. Letters from a woman to her husband about their mass murderer teenage son
4. A brilliant children's book that includes tiny letters addressed to fairy tale characters that kids can lift out and open
5. A book about race and racism in the form of a letter from the author to his 14-year old son

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- a. *The Jolly Postman* by Janet and Allan Ahlberg
 - b. *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates
 - c. *The Screwtape Letters* by C S Lewis
 - d. *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker
 - e. *We Need to Talk about Kevin* by Lionel Shriver

This week's story isn't about letters but it's too good to leave out. It's also exactly 100 words. Read it then have a go and see if you can match it.

Thicker than Water

I took my grandfather out to dinner for his birthday, because it seemed the proper thing to do. Neither of us particularly wanted to go to dinner together, but since he was alone and I happened to be visiting town during his birthday, I felt compelled to insist. My grandfather and I don't have much in common; he's a retired arms dealer, I am a circus clown. But after some tortuous small talk concerning weather, wealth and health, as the meal began we were finally able to come together as a family in the way we treated our waitress like total shit.

Jean-Luc Bouchard

ANSWERS Epistolary novels

1. *The Colour Purple* by Alice Walker (d)
2. *The Screwtape Letters* by CS Lewis (c)
3. *We Need to Talk About Kevin* by Lionel Shriver (e)
4. *The Jolly Postman* by Janet and Allan Ahlberg (a)
5. *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi (b)

