**King, Lisa. “Rhetorical Sovereignty and Rhetorical Alliance in the Writing Classroom: Using American Indian Texts.” Pedagogy 12.2 (2012): 209-233.**

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In this essay, King uses the concepts of rhetorical sovereignty (Scott Lyons) and rhetorical alliance (Malea Powell) to provide a method for engaging Native rhetorics in the English classroom that gets beyond the staid contact zone or multiculturalism models that have become prevalent in English studies. She begins by establishing the exigency for Native texts in the context of multiculturalism English studies, and follows with historical background about the relationships of Native peoples’ to the English language. She then briefly critiques the limits of the “contact zone” model for working with Native texts, followed by a productive encounter with Lisa Eck’s postcolonial pedagogical model and its limits for the settler colonial (Vizenor’s “paracolonial”) context of Native rhetors. She then briefly introduces the concepts of rhetorical sovereignty through Scott Lyons’s article of the same name, and rhetorical alliance through Malea Powell’s “Down By the River,” introducing some wonderful questions wherein students can see how the text in question relates to both rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical alliance, inviting identifications and a tracing of the limits of permissible identifications with a text (a la Eck’s postcolonial pedagogy approach). King then closes with a case study showing the usefulness of the rhetorical sovereignty/alliance model in the classroom via a reading of Osage writer/scholar Carter Revard’s essay “Report to the Nation: Repossessing Europe.” This reading necessarily recontextualizes the essay through the lens of Osage sovereignty struggles since contact, and applies a sense of rhet sovereignty/alliance to the tripartite address of Osage/Pan-Native/Non-Native audiences.

**Full list of questions, cuz they’re awesome: (from 222-223)**

Recognizing rhetorical sovereignty asks that students dig deeper and try to understand what they do not know and what is not “about” them. A recognition of rhetorical sovereignty prompts instructors and students to consider questions like these:

What community/communities/people does the speaker-writer come from or claim?  
(Individual biographical and Indigenous community historical frameworks are  
important here.)

What are or might be the communicative goals of that community/those  
communities as enacted by the speaker-writer? How are those goals tied to the  
particular contexts/locations and exigency of each community?

What communit(ies) does the speaker address? (Often American Indian texts are  
addressing Native and non-Native audiences at the same time — how is this managed  
here?) How are these audiences identified?

What rhetorical strategies are present? How are they tied to the particular contexts,  
locations, and exigency of each community?

How are these strategies used to forward the communicative goals of the  
communities represented here?

How is this act of writing/composition in itself an act of rhetorical sovereignty?  
As a balance, a recognition of rhetorical alliance reminds instructors and  
students that this text, its history, and its legacy are “about” them, too. Rhe-  
torical alliance prompts us to consider questions like these:

What is at stake for each community involved in this communicative act, both for the  
speaker-writer and for the listener-reader? For the Native peoples involved, and for  
the non-Native people involved?

How do the communicative and interpretive goals of each community (both speaker-  
writer and listener-reader) meet in this writing? How do they influence one another?

Given there are multiple audiences, how does the speaker-writer negotiate his or her  
arguments? How does the speaker-writer appeal to multiple audiences in order to  
reach the communicative goals?

How are the listener-readers expected to participate in the rhetorical process? How  
do you as a listener-reader find yourself participating?

In what ways might this text be a call for rhetorical alliance between speaker-writer  
and listener-reader? Between the multiple audiences invoked?

In what ways might this text be an act of rhetorical alliance?

**Reflection:**  
King’s essay provides a fantastic rubric by which to usefully and substantively center Native texts in the American writing classroom, one that asks students to both read for how they are addressed/invited to identify AS WELL AS NOT addressed/actively asked to remain separate from a given text from a Native writer. This method goes past the “melting pot” potential of a postcolonial reading via Eck, and it centers the ongoing reality of settler or “paracolonialism” in the very classrooms we work in here in the USA and the Americas. (Related to this, I was excited to see her use of Sandy Grande’s work on the limits of critical pedagogies democratic impulse for peoples who are actively seeking to maintain their own right to *separateness*.)

There are two places where I would take King’s argument even further. The first requires deep care, and the second one seems a natural extension that King might support.

**1. Applying this to other non-whitestream rhetors’ texts:**  
I would venture to say that this rubric provided by King, these “dualities that honor and support Native survivance” (218) could be usefully applied to other discourse communities that find themselves on the periphery of the Euro-American story. Despite, for instance, African peoples’ more thorough insistence on expansion and inclusion within the American story, their rhetorical practices could also usefully be examined through the sovereignty/alliance rubric, especially so given Black Feminist insistence that alliances are crucial but they are not “home.” Built into any Black/Non-Black alliance in the Americas is ALSO a certain degree of rhetorical sovereignty. What’s more, Lyons invites the productive use of his rhetsov term to other marginalized groups:

“Get quotation of this.”

And Powell invites a similar reflection on the uses of “alliance” by other groups. This links nicely with Royster’s project in the field as well, which I’ve written more fully about [here](http://timrdoc.wordpress.com/2012/02/04/royster-jacqueline-jones-disciplinary-landscaping-or-contemporary-challenges-in-the-history-of-rhetoric-philosophy-and-rhetoric-36-2-2003-148-167/) and already connected it to this rubric that King introduced to me back at the 2010 CCCCs Indigenous Rhetorics workshop.

While it is supremely important to honor the particularly Anishinaabe/Miami roots of these terms, and the important distinctions between the African-American and Indigenous projects on this continent (allowing for the incredible diversity of approaches within these discourse communities, these “Nation-peoples”), this might productively be accomplished by Andrea Smith’s work in the “3 Pillars of White Supremacy”…IF this can be productively bridged with care, it leads nicely into the 2nd extension I’d propose of Lisa King’s productive application of Lyons/Powell…

**2. Student Rhetorical Production!** — Given the longtime focus from SRTOL, this seems like one phenomenal approach that gets past student hermeneutical acumen with others’ texts and moves them into bringing their own home languages and topoi more fully into their own writing production in the classroom. Choices then become about alliance and/or sovereignty, rather than the more static opposition/assimilation. Grammatical systems and stylistic choices become places where students can make choices about how to negotiate the varied potential readership of their texts in ways that are aware–if not even strategic to the fullest extent possible–of the choices of language they can make in every situation, and the limits of identification that can come from such choices.

In both these extensions, the same basic principle applies: teachers have to be ready to name and productively facilitate discussions about the racial and colonial hierarchies/negations that push at all texts and rhetors.

**Quotations:**  
*On limits of multicultural “inclusion” approach to texts/pedagogy in rhet/comp:*“Yet those rhetorics that do the encompassing — those rhetorics  
that build the prime narrative in rhetoric and composition and set up a need  
for inclusion in the first place — often remain uninterrogated.” (210)

*On the limits of the contact zone as too calcifying (leaves hegemonic positions intact), but also one that takes its roots from appropriating an indigenous writer (Guaman Poma) from his context in a culture-in-flux that appropriates the oppressor to do its own resistance work, not as an undeveloped culture becoming “hybrid” on a line toward assimilation:*“What Guaman Poma shows us — what I argue we need — is a way to  
refigure the classroom as meeting place, but one not cast in the vocabulary of  
domination and subordination or colonizer and colonized, of only clashing  
and grappling. Power differentials or histories of imperialism should certainly  
not be glossed over, but we can choose different terms by which to address  
each other now, to begin seeking ways to speak to the common project we  
share and respect the projects in our respective communities.” (216)

*On the concepts of rhet sov/rhet alliance from conclusion:*More than just providing history, background, or a slid-  
ing linear scale of relative proximity with polar opposites as bookends (this  
is about you, this is not about you), rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical  
alliance are dualities that honor and support Native survivance. They are  
principles that call attention to one of the most profound concepts shaping  
Native communities past and present — sovereignty — while acknowledging  
the alliances those same communities have forged to bring themselves into  
the present. Rhetorical sovereignty demands that in this paracolonial situ-  
ation we all inhabit, each Native community and its right to determine its  
communicative course must be respected lest the rhetorics it employs lose  
their significance in the general call for multiculturalism. At the same time,  
rhetorical alliance insists that across these lines, we can assist one another,  
that we can teach one another something. (218)

At the core, teaching with rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical alli-  
ance asks us to do the difficult and challenging work of calling institution-  
alized racism as we see it, even in our own work, and undoing the erasure  
that multiculturalism tends to wreak on Native writers and Native texts.(230)

It reminds us that the very frames we set for “contact” in our classrooms will set the terms of the discussion and that we must be careful that those terms do not inadvertently cancel out Indigenous voices as Indigenous voices when they speak from Indigenous contexts to a  
wider audience. Yet this hard work does not have to be set up as contact zone  clashing. Rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical alliance also set the frame of the discussion in terms of a mutual recognition and meeting, of respect between Native writer/rhetor and the audiences who interact with his or her text. They set the frame in terms of alliance, an acknowledgment of how keeping a prime narrative for our classrooms and our discipline — even one with good intentions — will compromise everyone. Alliance recognizes that  
we need each one’s contributions, to keep the balance. (230)