

“SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT”

AFRICAN-AMERICAN SPIRITUAL SONG

**English Through Songs
and their Cultural Background
(Teacher’s Notes)**

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OBJECTIVES:

First of all, I would like to point out that this particular didactic unit is focused on the last stage of Secondary Education and has been mainly designed for first year Bachillerato students. In this sense, the materials have been provided in accordance with the level of English these students are expected to deal with and command. The basic framework on which I have constructed these listening activities can be divided into three main stages:

1. **Pre listening**, during which I will help students prepare to listen.

- *Motivation*: select a text that they will find interesting (slavery in the US)
- *Contextualisation*: design tasks that will help students to contextualise the listening. The idea is to gain access to their existing knowledge and expectations to help them understand the text.
- *Preparation*: explain vocabulary or expressions that students will need.
- *Extra-curricular topics*: include ideas such as freedom, equal rights, diversity and equality as part of the knowledge students will have access to.
- *Interdisciplinary aim*: explain students how this particular song might help them consolidate aspects belonging to the area of Spanish language, e.g., literary resources such as rhythm, metaphors or comparisons.

Activities:

In this stage we can find two sorts of activities: ‘multiple choice’ and ‘fill in the gaps’. The former is based on four texts about the treatment of slaves, African-American spiritual songs, the meaning of such songs and an example of them, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”. The latter deals with a curious phenomenon: the adoption of “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” as the hymn of English rugby supporters.

Students will have to read carefully these texts in order to find the specific information and answer both sorts of activities. The correct understanding of the content of these texts requires patience, so I will encourage students to read slowly and not to worry about time.

With these pre-listening activities, students will have access to the social and cultural background necessary to understand the lyrics of the song as well as think about concepts such as segregation or equal rights.

2. **While listening**, during which I would help to focus their attention on the listening text and guide the development of their understanding of it.

Activity:

The song will be played several times and students will have to cope with a 'fill in the gaps' exercise. Once every student has finished the exercise, the song will be played again so that they can confirm their answers.

In order to succeed in carrying out this activity, it is necessary to bear in mind the following steps:

1. It is important to help students **prepare** for the listening task, **ensure** that the students understand the language to complete the task and are **fully aware** of exactly what is expected of them. **Reassure** the students that they do not need to understand every word they hear.
2. During the listening the students should be able to **concentrate** on understanding the message **without trying to read, draw, and write** at the same time. Always give a second or third chance to listen to the text to provide a new opportunity to those who were not able to do the task.
3. Finally, when students have completed the activity, **invite answers** from the whole class. Try not to press individual students. **Play the cassette again** and allow students to listen again for confirmation. **List the answers** and let them choose the correct one. **Listen to the text once more** and tell them to **check** their answers for themselves.

3. **Post listening**, during which I will help our students integrate what they have learnt from the text into their existing knowledge.

Activities:

In this last stage students will have to cope with seven exercises focused on either grammar or vocabulary. The first four exercises are based on grammar, particularly the Future Tense and the First Conditional. All of them have been designed following the pattern of 'drill' exercises but the first, which consists of a list of sentences students have to translate from Spanish into English. The rest of exercises are based on vocabulary belonging to the semantic areas of food, drinks and dreams as well as another exercise dealing with opposite adjectives and prepositions.

The rest of exercises found in section IV have been provided with the aim of developing students' creative skills. The first of these exercises encourage students to rewrite the lyrics of the song paying special attention to some specific words while the second has to do with the translation of the hymn of a Spanish football team into English.

I. INTRODUCTION:

- **The Future tense:** *I will go to University*
- **The 1st conditional sentence:** *if you study, you'll pass you exam*
- **Irregular Verbs:** *give, gave, given*
- **The opposite:** *up/down----before/after-----in/out....*
- **Daily life habits:** *food, drinks, dreams...*
- **Culture:** *African-American culture: slavery and religion*

1.1 CULTURAL QUIZ

Treatment of slaves in the USA from 1776 to 1850¹

Slaves were treated with violence both when working and when walking in public because violence was legal at that time. Slaves worked mainly on large plantations, and slave overseers used to whip and brutalize them. Abolitionists were those groups of people that were against this brutality. Slaves could even die if they were captured after running away from plantations. They also risked losing members of their families as they were traded for profit or to pay debts.



Historical records indicate that some slave owners were crueller to slaves than others. Some slave owners raped and whipped slaves and even cut off limbs of slaves who tried to escape, while other slave owners provided materially for their slaves and were less physically abusive. In many households, treatment of slaves varied with the slave's skin colour. Darker-skinned slaves worked in the fields, while lighter-skinned slaves were made to work in the house and had better provisions.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_slavery_in_the_United_States

1. Where did slaves mainly work on?

- a) Mines b) schools c) farms d) plantations

2. What is the name of those groups of people who fought for equal rights and against slavery?

- a) Nationalists b) abolitionists c) modernists d) plantationists

3. Slaves could even die if they were after running away:

- a) Happy b) ruptured c) overjoyed d) captured

4. According to historical records, some slave owners were than others:

- a) Happier b) crueller c) easier d) funnier

5. The treatment of slaves varied with:

- a) slave's skin colour b) slave's face c) colour d) slave's skin

6. Darker-skinned slaves worked in:

- a) the farms b) the fields c) the fence d) the house

7. Lighter-skinned slaves worked in:

- a) the farms b) the fields c) the fence d) the house



The tunes and the beats of African American songs, before 1865²

In the early nineteenth century, African Americans were involved in the “Second Awakening”. They met in camp meetings and sang without any hymnbook. Spontaneous songs were composed on the spot. They were called “spiritual songs” and the term “sperichil” (spiritual) appeared for the first time in the book “Slave Songs of The United States” (by Allen, Ware, Garrison, 1867). The very first Negro spiritual songs were inspired by African music. Some of them, which were called “shouts”, were accompanied with typical dancing including hand clapping and foot tapping.

Some African American religious singing at this time was referred as a “moan” (or a “groan”). Moaning (or groaning) does not imply pain. It is a kind of blissful rendition of a song, often mixed with humming and spontaneous melodic variation.

8. African Americans met in camp meetings and sang spontaneous songs composed on the spot and known as:

- a) a nice song b) a spiritual song c) a shout d) a moan

9. The very first Negro spiritual songs were inspired by music:

- a) Irish b) African c) Spanish d) British

10. Negro spiritual songs including hand clapping and foot tapping are known as:

- a) cries b) shots c) shouts d) yell

11. Some African American religious singing at this time was referred as:

- a) a noon b) a moon c) a shout d) a moan



² <http://www.negrospirituals.com/>

African American spiritual songs and their meanings³

As most Negro spirituals are Christian songs, most of them concern what the Bible says and how to live with the Spirit of God. For example, the “dark days of bondage” were enlightened by the hope and faith that God will not leave slaves alone.

By the way, African Americans used to sing outside of churches. During slavery and afterwards, slaves and workers who were working at fields or elsewhere outdoors, were allowed to sing “work songs”. This was the case, when they had to coordinate their efforts for hauling a fallen tree or any heavy load. Even prisoners used to sing “chain gang” songs when they worked on the road or on some construction project.

But some slaveholders also allowed slaves to sing “quiet” songs. They were used for expressing personal feeling and for cheering one another. So, even at work, slaves could sing “secret messages”. This was the case of Negro spirituals, which were sung at church, in meetings, at work and at home.

The meaning of these songs was most often covert. Therefore, only Christian slaves understood them, and even when ordinary words were used, they reflected personal relationship between the slave singer and God.

12. Most Negro spiritual songs are:

- a) nice songs b) spiritual songs c) Christian songs d) a moan

13. Apart from slaves and workers, who used to sing “work or chain gang” songs?:

- a) firemen b) police c) prisoners d) drivers

14. Negro spiritual songs included for expressing feelings and cheering one another:

- a) secret messages b) rimes c) secret massages d) drivers

15. The meaning of Negro spiritual songs was most often:

- a) clear b) concise c) covert d) clean

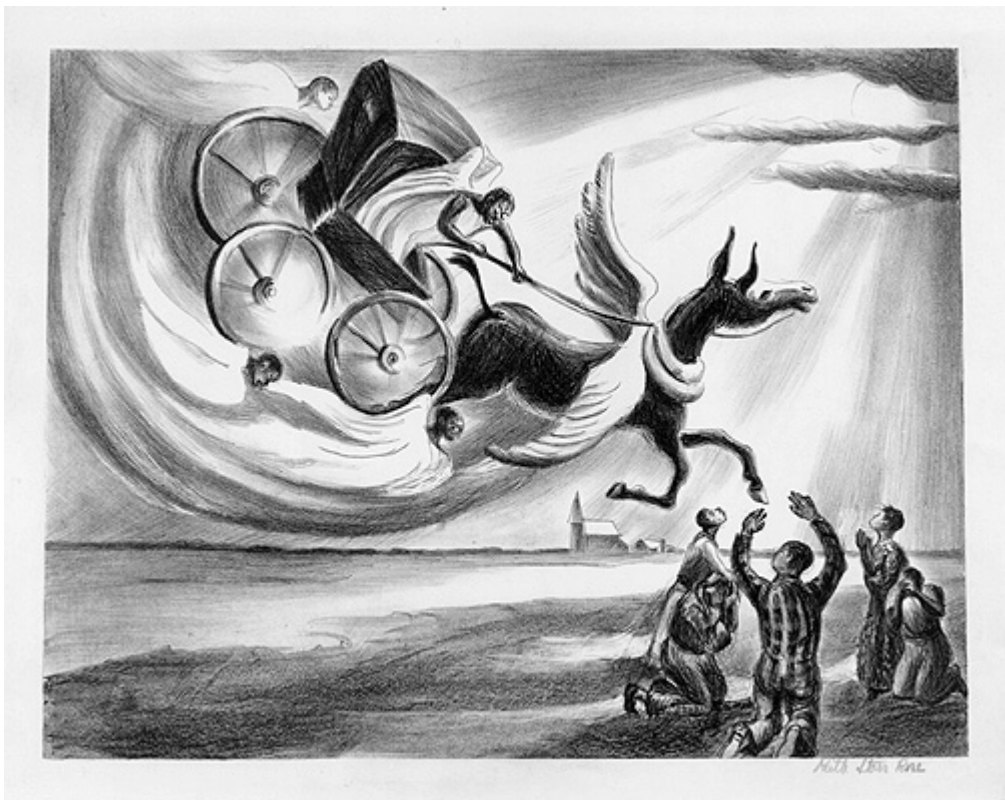
³ <http://www.negrospirituals.com/>

"Swing Low, Sweet Chariot"⁴

"Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" is a United States spiritual folk song. The codes of the first negro spirituals are often related with an escape to a free country. For example, a "home" is a safe place where everyone can live free. So, a "home" can mean Heaven, but it covertly means a sweet and free country, a haven for slaves. The ways used by fugitives running to a free country were riding a "chariot" or a "train".

The negro spirituals "The Gospel Train" and "Swing low, sweet chariot" which directly refer to the Underground Railroad, an informal organization who helped many slaves to flee.

Then, "Swing low, sweet chariot" refers to Ripley, a "station" of the Underground Railroad, where fugitive slaves were welcome. This town is atop a hill, by Ohio River, which is not easy to cross. So, to reach this place, fugitives had to wait for help coming from the hill. The words of this spirituals say, "I looked over Jordan and what did I see/ Coming for to carry me home/ A band of angels coming after me"



⁴ <http://www.negrospirituals.com/>

16. Which type of song is Swing Low, Sweet Chariot?

- a) Rock b) spiritual punk c) spiritual folk d) hip hop

17. The codes of the first negro spirituals are often related with an to a free country:

- a) escape b) spiritual song c) shout d) moan

18. Negro spirituals like “Swing low, sweet chariot” directly refers to the:

- a) Jesus b) abolitionists c) modernists d) Underground Railroad

19. Which station of the Underground Railroad does “Swing low, sweet chariot” refer to? :

- a) Atocha b) Rickety c) Ripley d) Underground Railroad

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot at present⁵

The song today also has a large association with English rugby union and is also regularly sung at England national rugby union team matches.

*Coming into the last match of the 1988 season, against Ireland at Twickenham, England had lost 15 of their previous 23 matches in the Five Nations Championship. The Twickenham crowd had only seen one solitary England try in the previous two years and at half time against Ireland they were 0-3 down. During the second half the floodgates opened and England scored a remarkable six tries in a thumping 35-3 win. Three of the tries came in quick succession from Chris Oti, a black player making his Twickenham debut. A group from the Benedictine school Douai started to sing a rugby club favourite – the gospel hymn *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* – in honour of their new hero, the whole crowd joined in. The England national rugby union team returned from the 2003 World Cup triumph in Australia on a plane dubbed 'Sweet Chariot'.*

The song is still regularly sung at matches by supporters.

1.2 Fill in the gap by choosing the correct answer:

(1) ----- song today also (2) ----- a large association (3) ----- English rugby union and is also regularly (4) ----- at England national (5) ----- union team (6) -----.

In the last match of the (7) ----- season, (8) ----- Ireland at Twickenham, (9) ----- had lost 15 of their previous 23 (10) ----- in the Five Nations (11) ----- . The Twickenham crowd had only seen one solitary England try in the previous two years and at half time against Ireland they were 0-3 down. (12) ----- the second half the floodgates opened and England (13) ----- a remarkable six tries in a thumping 35-3 win. Three of the tries came in quick succession from Chris Oti, a (14) ----- player making his Twickenham (15) ----- . A group from the Benedictine school Douai started to (16) ----- a rugby club favourite – the gospel hymn *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* – in (17) ----- of their new (18) ----- , the whole crowd joined in. The England (19) ----- rugby union (20) ----- returned from the 2003 (21) ----- Cup triumph in Australia on (22) ----- dubbed 'Sweet Chariot'

The (23) ----- is still regularly (24) ----- at matches by (25) -----

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swing_Low,_Sweet_Chariot

- | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 1. a) a | b) an | c) these | d) the |
| 2. a) have | b) has | c) had | d) ham |
| 3. a) in | b) on | c) with | d) upon |
| 4. a) sung | b) rung | c) drunk | d) sunk |
| 5. a) football | b) rugby | c) cricket | d) handball |
| 6. a) farms | b) meetings | c) matches | d) parades |
| 7. a) funny | b) cloudy | c) sunny | d) 1988 |
| 8. a) against | b) for | c) with | d) without |
| 9. a) Russia | b) Spain | c) England | d) EEUU |
| 10. a) farms | b) meetings | c) matches | d) parades |
| 11. a) Olympic | b) championship | c) relationship | d) friendship |
| 12. a) under | b) with | c) on | d) during |
| 13. a) scored | b) found | c) did | d) run |
| 14. a) orange | b) black | c) red | d) pink |
| 15. a) break | b) homework | c) debut | d) party |
| 16. a) sing | b) ring | c) drink | d) sink |
| 17. a) fun | b) grace | c) joke | d) honour |
| 18. a) magician | b) knight | c) hero | d) prince |
| 19. a) national | b) irrational | c) clerical | d) medical |
| 20. a) firm | b) team | c) band | d) gang |
| 21. a) country | b) town | c) world | d) village |
| 22. a) a car | b) a bike | c) a train | d) a plane |
| 23. a) song | b) TV | c) radio | d) show |
| 24. a) sunk | b) rung | c) drunk | d) sung |
| 25. a) friends | b) supporters | c) old people | d) children |



II. PRESENTING THE SONG

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot → link from which the song can downloaded:
http://www.songbirdofswing.com/the_songs/Swing_Low/

Chorus (in bold):

Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home
Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home

I looked over Jordan and what did I see
Coming for to carry me home
A band of angels coming after me
Coming for to carry me home

Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home
Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home

If you get there before I do
Coming for to carry me home
Tell all my friends I'm coming there too
Coming for to carry me home

Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home
Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home

Sometimes I'm up and sometimes I'm down
Coming for to carry me home
But still my soul feels heavenly bound
Coming for to carry me home

Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home
Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home

2.1 Fill in the blanks:

Chorus (in bold):

Swing low,chariot
..... for to carry me
Swing low, chariot
Coming for to carry me

I over Jordan and did I
..... for to me
A band of coming me
..... for to me

Swing low,chariot
..... for to carry me
Swing low, chariot
Coming for to carry me

If you there I do
..... for to me
.....all my I'm coming there
..... for to me

Swing low,chariot
..... for to carry me
Swing low, chariot
Coming for to carry me

..... I'm and sometimes I'm
..... for to me
..... still my soul heavenly bound
..... for to me

Swing low,chariot
..... for to carry me
Swing low, chariot
Coming for to carry me

III. PRACTISING THE LANGUAGE

3.1 Translate these sentences into English.

- John no irá a la universidad *John will not go to university*
- Alice trabajará en una oficina *Alice will work in an office*
- ¿Vivirá Pete cerca del mar? *Will Pete live near the sea?*
- Creo que lloverá mañana *I think it will rain tomorrow*
- Si no nieva este invierno, no iré a esquiar.
If it does not snow this winter, I won't go skiing
- No aprenderé a jugar si no entreno
I won't learn to play if I don't train
- Si no vienes, iremos solos
If you don't come, we'll go alone
- Si compras algo, pide el recibo
If you buy anything, ask for the receipt

3.2 Complete the sentences with the verbs in the box. Use the present simple or will, affirmative or negative.

Not do go not hear not leave not listen miss see
--

1. If they don't arrive soon, they ...*will miss*.... the film
2. If you ...do not listen..... in class, you won't understand
3. If we go to San Francisco next year, we...*will see*.... The Golden Gate Bridge
4. If you don't turn on the radio, you*won't hear*... the football results
5. If there's enough snow, I ...*will go*..... skiing tomorrow
6. If we*don't leave*.... now , we'll be late

3.3 Match the following sentences:

I'll help you.	It'll break
It'll do all your housework!	She'll have to work very hard
We'll have to stay at home	They won't catch the train

1. If you drop that vase, *it'll break*
2. If she wants to go to university, ... *she'll have to work very hard*
3. If you don't understand the exercise, *I'll help you*
4. If the weather is bad,*we'll have to stay at home*.....
5. If you buy a robot, *it'll do all your housework!*.....
6. If they don't hurry up, *They won't catch the train*

GRAMMAR

FUTURO

Como vemos, ésta forma de futuro en inglés es bastante simple. De hecho, suele denominarse FUTURO SIMPLE (Future Simple)

Una forma habitual de futuro en inglés tiene la siguiente estructura:

Sujeto + will + verbo

I will play / *Yo jugaré*

Podemos encontrarnos con otra forma auxiliar, válida también para expresar el futuro, que es 'shall'. En este caso, 'shall' sirve como auxiliar para la primera persona del singular y plural empleándose 'will' para todas las demás. Tanto 'shall' como 'will' pueden contraerse en sus formas afirmativa y negativa (*You will* → *You'll*). 'Shall' es menos utilizado, especialmente en Estados Unidos. En inglés moderno se tiende a usar 'will' para todas las personas.

AFIRMATIVA

I (shall / will) play *Yo jugaré*
You will play *Tú jugarás*
He will play *Él jugará*
We (shall / will) play *Nosotros jugaremos*
You will play *Vosotros jugareis*
They will play *Ellos jugarán*

NEGATIVA

I (shall / will) not play *Yo no jugaré*
You will not play *Tú no jugarás*
He will not play *Él no jugará*
We (shall / will) not play *Nosotros no jugaremos*
You will not play *Vosotros no jugaréis*
They will not play *Ellos no jugarán*

En la forma interrogativa se invierte el orden de sujeto y auxiliar:

Will you play? / *¿Jugarás?*

La forma estructura de la forma interrogativa-negativa es:
auxiliar + sujeto + not

Will you not play? / *¿No jugarás?*

PRIMERA CONDICIONAL

	Conditional clause	Main clause
	If + Present Tense	will + inf / present tense / imperative
A	If she works hard,	she'll pass her exams. (will + inf)
B	If you don't come,	we pick you up. (Pres. tense)
C	If you see Mr Fox tonight,	tell him I am ill. (imperative).

3.4 Fill in the blanks with the correct form of the irregular verbs

Infinitive (w/o to)	Past Simple	Past Participle	Translation
do	did	done	hacer
be	was/were	been	Ser, estar
say	said	said	decir
see	saw	seen	ver
put	put	put	poner
cut	cut	cut	cortar
feel	felt	felt	sentir
read	read	read	leer
run	ran	run	correr
eat	ate	eaten	comer
become	became	become	Llegar a ser
forgive	forgave	forgiven	perdonar
tear	tore	torn	rasgar
freeze	froze	frozen	congelar
blow	blew	blown	soplar
lay	laid	laid	Poner, colocar
lie	lay	lain	echarse
lie	lied	lied	mentir
wear	wore	worn	llevar puesto
sweep	swept	swept	barrer

3.5 The opposite: Fill in the blanks with the correct letters. The words in the list on the right provide a clue to the answer.

- | | | | |
|--------------|-----------|---------------|---------|
| 1) _ at | thin | 9) _ n | out |
| 2) s _ nny | cloudy | 10) _ ef _ re | after |
| 3) _ ong | short | 11) _ p | down |
| 4) hig _ | low | 12) o _ | under |
| 5) _ ut _ re | past | 13) _ i _ th | without |
| 6) e _ rly | late | | |
| 7) che _ p | expensive | | |
| 8) _ _ ight | dark | | |

fat, sunny, long, high, future, early, cheap, light, in, before, up, on, with

3.6 Word search: Find and translate the list of words given

Dream, dream, dream

A O M L A I W P B D S E U M M
E R V W A O N E I G H R T S D
R E A E L T D E A M B A Y W I
L K L L R C E L I A D M W M S
E H I A O N K S E S A T A P E
A P R V E X I G P G Y H K J D
S U E C S T T G M F D G E W A
Z R A O T L Y D H R R I U K Q
M F U D G E T E Q T E N P V V
T A G J O A E Y V C A D E C Y
K U E X P R V X Q H M V E E V
Y S K R Z L U C N H O U L I M
G J A I D Y D M Q L V T S R F
C L M L Q M O T G B S U A A N
G O P N M L P Q C G O V H L W

ASLEEP
AWAKE
BEDCOVER
DAYDREAM
DREAM
DUVET
EARLY
LATE
NIGHTMARE
OVERNIGHT
PILLOW
SLEEP
WAKEUP

“Swing low, Sweet Chariot”

COMINGHJOKOJSWING
HAEMSERWCARRYSAQ
AFTESGHRESFSWQASD
RTYSFCOKSAJORDANS
IMNSDRMSESFSWCEFS
ODELEREZANGELSAWE
TSWDFRTFCBTSOULWT

COMING, HOME, CHARIOT, CARRY, SWING, JORDAN, ANGELS, SOUL

3.7 Unscramble the following words:

FOOD AND DRINKS

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1) swcinahd <i>_sandwich</i> | 6) ldsaa <i>____salad</i> |
| 2) nnabaa <i>___banana</i> | 7) juiec <i>____juice</i> |
| 3) trewa <i>___water</i> | 8) phsic <i>__chips</i> |
| 4) ubrrge <i>__burger</i> | 9) elpppnica <i>____pineapple</i> |
| 5) klim <i>____milk</i> | 10) mrloetnwa <i>____watermelon</i> |

IV. CREATIVE WORK

4.1 Rewrite the lyrics changing the words in bold:

Swing **low**, sweet **chariot**
Coming for to **carry** me **home**
Swing **low**, sweet **chariot**
Coming for to **carry** me **home**

I **looked over Jordan** and what did I see
Coming for to carry me home
A band of **angels** coming **after** me
Coming for to carry me home

If you get there **before** I do
Coming for to carry me home
Tell all my **friends** I'm coming **there** too
Coming for to carry me home

Sometimes I'm **up** and **sometimes** I'm **down**
Coming for to carry me home
But still **my soul** feels heavenly bound
Coming for to carry me home

V. SINGING THE SONG

Swing Low Sweet Chariot

Swing low, sweet cha - ri - ot___ Co-min' for to car-ry me home! Swing_ low, sweet

cha - ri - ot___ Co-min' for to car-ry me home! I looked o-ver Jor-dan and what did I see,___

Co-min' for to car - ry me home! A band__ of an - gels co-min' af - ter me,___

Co-min' for to car-ry me home!

VI. EXTRA MATERIAL

Adaptation of “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” by Beyoncé Knowles

Lyrics → <http://www.lyricsandsongs.com/song/176450.html>

Video → <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eySGx7NubvI>