

Juan Ponce de Leon

Juan Ponce de Leon was born in Spain in 1460. Around 1490 Ponce de Leon was a soldier in the Spanish army where he was fighting in southern Spain. In 1493 he joined the Spanish sailing crew of Christopher Columbus on Columbus' second journey to the West Indies as the islands in the Bahamas were called. When Columbus again returned to Spain after his second journey, Ponce de Leon remained in what today is the Dominican Republic.

In 1508 Ponce de Leon then conquered another island, today the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico, because he thought there was gold on the island. He became governor of this island in 1509. Ponce de Leon was removed as governor in 1511 but left this position as a wealthy man.

In February, 1512, he received permission from the King of Spain to "discover and settle Bimini", an island supposedly located in the Bahamas. There was thought to be a spring of water on the island that had life-giving powers and today we say that Ponce de Leon was looking for "the fountain of youth." No one knew the exact location of this island but Ponce de Leon and ships that he financed himself sailed from Puerto Rico in March, 1513. After about a month of sailing he and his crew reached the east coast of Florida near the present day city of St. Augustine. He called the land Florida and claimed it for Spain.

Ponce de Leon continued to search for the island of Bimini and when he returned to Puerto Rico he fought with the native people who were rebelling against Spanish rule. When Ponce de Leon returned to Spain in 1514 he was promoted to Captain General by the King of Spain. Ponce de Leon made two more trips from Spain in his continuing search for the island of Bimini and its spring of eternal water.

On his last journey in 1521, Ponce de Leon this time explored the west coast of Florida. However, the Calusa native people he encountered there fought the Spanish intruders and Ponce de Leon was wounded with a poison arrow while in Florida. He was able to return to Cuba where he died in 1521. He is buried in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Juan Ponce de Leon Graphic Organizer

Who	What	When



Where	Why	How

Name: _____

Date: _____

Juan Ponce de Leon Multiple Choice Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. Where was Ponce de Leon born?
 - a. Italy
 - b. Spain
 - c. Portugal

2. Before having his own ships, Ponce de Leon sailed with what other famous explorer?
 - a. Christopher Columbus
 - b. Vasco da Gama
 - c. Marco Polo

3. Which country financed his voyage?
 - a. Spain
 - b. Portugal
 - c. Italy

4. How long was Ponce de Leon governor of Puerto Rico?
 - a. 1 year
 - b. 2 years
 - c. 3 years

5. The "fountain of youth" was a
 - a. Fountain of chocolate
 - b. A drinking fountain with a handle
 - c. A spring of water with healing properties

6. What was Bimini supposed to be?
 - a. An island
 - b. Part of Florida
 - c. One of Ponce de Leon's ships

7. How did Ponce de Leon die?
 - a. From illness in Florida
 - b. By a poison arrow
 - c. By drowning in the ocean

Name: _____

Date: _____

Juan Ponce de Leon Short Answer Questions

1. Christopher Columbus was born in Italy and Ponce de Leon was born in Spain. Why was Ponce de Leon sailing with Columbus?
2. When Ponce de Leon was removed as governor of Puerto Rico he was a wealthy man. Where did his wealth come from?
3. Is there such a thing as a "fountain of youth" that keeps people young? Explain your answer.
4. Would you have joined Ponce de Leon in his search for "the fountain of youth" and the island of Bimini? Explain why or why not.
5. The Calusa people of Florida fought the Spanish immediately but other native people did not. Why do you think other native people did not fight the Spanish right away?
6. Ponce de Leon thought that Florida was another island. We know now that Florida is attached to the rest of the United States. Why do you think that Ponce de Leon thought that Florida was an island?
7. Do you think that Ponce de Leon is as important to history as Christopher Columbus and John Cabot? Explain why or why not.

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Answer Key

Multiple Choice

1. b.
2. a.
3. a.
4. b.
5. c.
6. a.
7. b.

Short Answer Questions

1. Columbus was sailing for the King and Queen of Spain.
2. There was gold on Puerto Rico. The Spanish conquerors took the gold and other valuables from the native people.
3. Individual response but generally no such thing. Everyone ages and eventually dies.
4. Individual response.
5. The native people thought of the Spanish as visitors so they did not fight them right away. The native people did not realize that the Spanish can take over the lands.
6. Every other piece of land that Ponce de Leon explored in the area was an island.
7. Individual response.