

JUAN PONCE DE LEÓN



BIOGRAPHY

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Probably the first European explorer to land in what is now Florida was the Spanish conquistador (meaning "conqueror") Juan Ponce de León. De León had sailed with Columbus on his second voyage of exploration in 1493, and settled on Hispaniola (modern day Dominican Republic), where he became deputy governor. In 1506, de León reached Puerto Rico.

Encouraged by stories of gold and a mystical "fountain of youth", de León decided on another voyage that would take him north through the Bahamas. He received permission from the King, and in 1513 de León waded ashore on the northeast coast of Florida, somewhere near present-day Augustine. He called the area La Florida, meaning "the place of flowers". De León and his men sailed down the east coast as far as Cape Canaveral ("place of currents"), the Keys, and the Tortuga Islands, and then up the west coast as far as modern day Charlotte.

Spanish ships from the Caribbean may have been already secretly raiding Florida to capture Native American slaves before de León landed there. Native Americans of the east coast and the southwest coast of Florida were hostile to de León. He also met a Native American in Florida who knew some Spanish words, reinforcing the idea that illegal slave-traders had beaten him to it.

In 1521, Ponce de León returned to Florida again, this time with plans to build a colony. He landed on the gulf beaches between Charlotte Harbor and Estero Bay with 200 settlers, horses, tools, and seeds. As they went inland for fresh water, the Calusa peoples ambushed them. Ponce de León was shot in the thigh by an arrow and was seriously wounded. The settlers decided to abandon the settlement and sail back to Cuba. Ponce de León died of his wound in Cuba, at the age of 61.

Understanding words

Before we can understand a story we have to know what all of the words mean. Let's try one...

a Write the sentence in which you found the word 'mystical'.

b From that sentence, suggest what 'mystical' means.

c Write a new sentence using the word 'mystical'.

d Use a dictionary to find words with a similar meaning (synonyms) to 'mystical'.

e Draw a small picture showing what you think 'mystical' means.

Try this for other words, too. 2

Finding key words

Next, we need to find the key words that tell us what the story is about...

Read the story and underline the key words. Write the most important of these key words in a list like the one below. Write next to it a word that means a similar thing (a synonym). You don't have to use all the spaces, but you should not use more.

Key word	Synonym (similar word)
Example: abandon	desert

Sequencing

Sequencing means getting the events in the right order. Write these sentences in the correct order, so they make sense.

In 1513, de León landed on the coast of North America, and called the land 'La Florida'.

Later, de León returned to Florida and tried to settle there.

But the people who already lived there fought back and fatally shot de León.

Juan Ponce de León sailed with Columbus on his second voyage.

After he heard tales of gold and a "fountain of youth", de León started exploring further north.

Then de León settled on Hispaniola and became its deputy governor.

De León and his men then explored more of the Florida coast.

Get to the facts

1 Who did Ponce de León sail with in 1493?

2 When did Ponce de León first reach Florida?

3 What does the name 'La Florida' mean?

4 How many settlers did Ponce de León bring with him?

5 How did Ponce de León die?

Make a story...

When you read a description it often gives you ideas about how the event might be described differently.

The Fountain of Youth

Today a traveler told me a great story. He described the fountain of youth, which has the power to keep people young forever. He said it was... (now complete the story)

Below is a plain text version for printing:

Understanding words:

- a Write the sentence in which you found the word 'mystical'.
- b From that sentence, suggest what 'mystical' means.
- c Write a new sentence using the word 'mystical'.
- d Use a dictionary to find words with a similar meaning (synonyms) to 'mystical'.
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Finding key words:

Read the story and underline the key words. Write the most important of these key words in a list. Write next to it a word that means a similar thing (a synonym).

For example:

Key word – abandon

Synonym – desert

Sequencing:

Write these sentences in the correct order, so they make sense:

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Later, de León returned to Florida and tried to settle there.

But the people who already lived there fought back and fatally shot de León.

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Make a story...

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Juan Ponce de León

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