

PONCE DE LEON AND THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH



Juan Ponce de León was the first Spanish explorer to arrive in Florida. Early Spanish explorers were known as *conquistadors* or “conquerors” because they would claim the land they reached for Spain. In 1493, Ponce de León sailed with Christopher Columbus on Columbus’ second voyage to the Americas. He and his family settled on an island in the Caribbean named Hispaniola, where he would later be appointed deputy governor.

In 1506, Ponce de León discovered a nearby island named Borinquen. While there, he found a large deposit of gold. He returned two years later and renamed the island Puerto Rico. He served as governor there for two years before Spain’s king had him replaced.

Hurt by the King’s action, Ponce de León sailed again, this time north through the Bahamas towards Florida. He was in search of new lands and treasures. He had also heard of a mythical Fountain of Youth. Caribbean natives spoke of a legendary, magical spring whose water was believed to make older people young again.

In late March of 1513, his ships landed on Florida’s east coast near present-day St. Augustine and he named it La Florida or “place of flowers.” Ponce de León continued down the east coast of Florida and along the Florida Keys until he arrived at an island that had many turtles. He named the island Dry Tortugas because there was no fresh water there and “tortugas” means “turtle” in Spanish.



Ponce de León’s ship continued on the west coast of Florida, where he and his men explored inland for food, fresh water, and to see if they could find the Fountain of Youth. They met the Calusa Indians, who threatened them and forced to flee back to their ships and return to Puerto Rico.

In 1521, Ponce de León returned to Florida again to build a farming colony. He landed on Florida’s west coast with over 200 settlers, horses, tools, and seeds. As they went inland for fresh water, the Calusa ambushed them. Ponce de León was shot in the thigh by an arrow and seriously wounded. The settlers decided to abandon the settlement and sail back to Cuba. Ponce de Leon never found his Fountain of Youth.

As a result of his wound, Ponce de León died at the age of 61 in Cuba. He will always be remembered as the brave conquistador who explored many parts of Florida and searched for the mythical Fountain of Youth.

Name _____

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Directions: After reading about Ponce de León, answer the questions below.

_____ **1. Read the dictionary entry.**

deposit (de·pos·it) n 1. Money placed in a bank account. 2 Anything given as part of a payment. 3. A mass of mineral matter in nature. 4. A place for safekeeping.

Which meaning of deposit is used in paragraph 2?

- A. 1
- B. 2
- C. 3
- D. 4



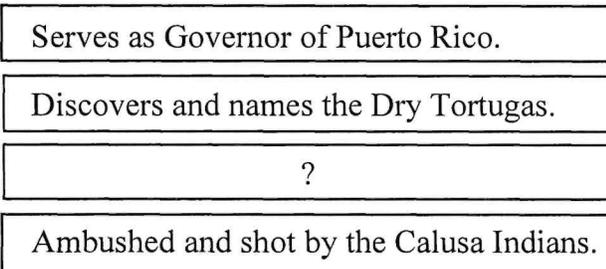
_____ **2. Why did Ponce de León first sail for Florida?**

- A. He wanted to build a farming colony.
- B. He was hurt when the King had him replaced as governor.
- C. He was wounded and needed to heal.
- D. He was appointed the governor there.

_____ **3. What question does paragraph 4 answer?**

- A. Where did Florida get its name?
- B. Where was the Fountain of Youth?
- C. What Indians did Ponce de León meet in Florida?
- D. What was Ponce de León's ship called?

_____ **4. Look at the flow chart showing Ponce de León's life.**



What belongs in the empty box?

- A. Explored the inland of Florida for water.
- B. Passes away in Cuba at age 61.
- C. Appointed deputy governor of Hispaniola.
- D. First lands in St. Augustine.