



### **Ponce de Leon Classroom Guide**

**Introduction:** Juan Ponce de Leon was a real life Don Quixote, in search of the mythical legend of the Fountain of Youth. Born in Spain in 1460, Ponce de Leon was a contemporary of Christopher Columbus in an era when the New World beckoned with the allure of unparalleled riches. Though cross-ocean exploration was incredibly dangerous, the discovery of new lands led to royal honors and unrivaled prestige for explorers. Like his fellow *conquistadores*, Ponce de Leon was driven by a desire for fame and fortune, and attention from the monarchy.

After sailing on expeditions with others to the New World including Christopher Columbus, Ponce de Leon led his own expeditions to explore and settle Puerto Rico, where he became the island's first governor. In his search for the elusive Fountain of Youth, Ponce de Leon later came upon Florida which he charted and explored for many years. He is credited for his sophisticated navigation skills and for locating the Gulf Stream current. Yet de Leon is also remembered as a harsh ruler who contributed to the decimation of the Native population in Florida. Educators and students will gain new insights into Ponce de Leon's role in world history through this 1-hour program; it is an excellent program to jumpstart discussions of the costs and consequences of the Age of Exploration.

#### **Curriculum Links:**

**Biography:** *Ponce de Leon* would be an excellent addition to History and Social Studies courses. It is appropriate for 7th grade and above.

#### **Vocabulary:**

Using a dictionary ([www.merriamwebster.com](http://www.merriamwebster.com)) or an encyclopedia, students may want to define or explain the significance of the following terms from this program:

- Feudal
- Vanguard
- Demographic
- Amnesty
- Crusade
- Navigator
- Indigenous
- Conquistador

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Why was Ponce de Leon considered a real life Don Quixote?
2. Who were the *conquistadors*? What three words would you use to describe them?
3. What is significant about the year 1492? Why was it considered the "window of opportunity" for Spanish explorers?
4. How did religion motivate the explorers to conquer new lands?
5. What happened to the native population within just a few years after the arrival of the conquistadores? How would you describe the treatment of the native people Ponce de Leon and his men encountered?
6. How did Ponce de Leon profit from the labor of native people?
7. Why was obtaining a royal coat of arms so important to Ponce de Leon?
8. What is the legend of the Fountain of Youth? Do you believe it exists?
9. Why was de Leon's discovery of the Gulf Stream important?
10. What is the origin of Florida's name?
11. How did Ponce de Leon's exhibition to Florida open up the New World to Spanish conquest?
12. How would you describe the legacy of Ponce de Leon?

### **Extended Activities:**

1. Exploration and settlement of the Caribbean and in the Florida took place long before colonies were established in Jamestown and Plymouth. Make an illustrated timeline of the Age of Exploration from the 1490s through the 1620s.
2. Imagine you are an explorer like Ponce de Leon embarking on a cross-ocean journey for the first time. Write a 1-2 page diary entry detailing your experiences on your voyage and your impressions of new lands. Combine your journal passage with those of your classmates to create a diary of exploration.
3. Ponce de Leon traveled far and wide across the globe in his quest for fame and fortune. Using the library or Internet resources, illustrate an authentic map of Ponce de Leon's journeys, including the historic names of the islands and states he settled. Display your map with those of your classmates in a gallery dedicated to Ponce de Leon's explorations.
4. Ponce de Leon was just one of many explorers who led expeditions to the New World. Online or at the library, chose another explorer and create a mini-biography of 1-2 pages presented on a poster, in PowerPoint, etc.

### **Websites**

Background info on Ponce de Leon from BIO:

<http://www.biography.com/articles/Juan-Ponce-de-León-9444105>

Primary source documents on the Age of Exploration:

<http://www.history.com/topics/womens-history-month>

A short narrative of Ponce de Leon's journeys:

[http://fcit.usf.edu/Florida/lessons/de\\_leon/de\\_leon1.htm](http://fcit.usf.edu/Florida/lessons/de_leon/de_leon1.htm)

### **Books**

Perez, Joseph and Janet Lloyd. *The Spanish Inquisition* (Yale University Press, 2006).

Sale, Kirkpatrick. *Christopher Columbus and the Quest of Paradise* (Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2006).

Worth, Richard. *Ponce de Leon and the Age of Spanish Exploration in World History* (Enslow Publishers, 2003).