

Vikings & European Explorers Ponce de Leon

In 1513, a Spanish explorer named Juan Ponce de Leon landed on the east coast of Florida. He was the first European explorer to reach the North American mainland. De Leon claimed the land for Spain so it could set up a colony.

De Leon, however, is probably remembered most for trying to find the Fountain of Youth. In 1512, King Ferdinand of Spain asked Ponce de Leon to explore an island north of Cuba. Legend has it that Juan was more than willing to take on this **mission**.¹ The **legendary**² spring was said to restore youth and cure sickness. De Leon thought the fountain lay north, and he wanted to be the first to find it. Historians today aren't sure whether the legend is true. They think de Leon knew about the fountain, but that he was most interested in more land he could govern.

From what people know about de Leon, he was an **ambitious**³ person. De Leon was born in 1474 near the town of Palencia in Spain. He was from a noble family and held a **respected**⁴ position in the Spanish court as a **page**.⁵ During this time, he became interested in sailing and exploration. It is believed that he may have sailed with Christopher Columbus on his second journey to the Caribbean. He became a soldier in Española, which is now Hispaniola. In 1508, he moved to the island of San Juan, what is now Puerto Rico. There, he conquered the territory after discovering gold. He became colonial governor of San Juan in 1509.

Ponce de Leon never did find the Fountain of Youth, which doesn't exist. Instead, he discovered something bigger, the North American continent. On April 2, 1513, he anchored off the coast of Florida. That day, he made history.

¹ **mission** – special job or task

² **legendary** – based on a story handed down from earlier times, may not be entirely true

³ **ambitious** – having a strong will to be successful

⁴ **respected** – admired

⁵ **page** – a person who runs errands or acts as a messenger

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Ponce de Leon was the first European to
 - a. reach the North American mainland.
 - b. reach South America.
 - c. sail across the Atlantic.
 - d. receive money for his voyage.

2. According to the passage, the word *noble* means
 - a. dangerous.
 - b. struggling.
 - c. unimportant.
 - d. high in rank and title.

3. The second paragraph of the passage tells explains
 - a. how the Fountain of Youth was discovered in 1513.
 - b. how Ponce de Leon is most remembered for trying to find The Fountain of Youth.
 - c. how the Fountain of Youth is a legend.
 - d. how the Fountain of Youth is located in Florida.

4. What do historians believe Ponce de Leon was most interested in when he took on the mission of exploring an island north of Cuba?
 - a. He wanted more lands to govern.
 - b. It was the most important island at the time.
 - c. His father wanted to be governor of a new land.
 - d. He wanted to discover The Fountain of Youth which was said to be located there.

5. Ponce de Leon would be described as
 - a. energetic
 - b. lazy
 - c. ambitious
 - d. generous

6. What effect might discovering North America have on an explorer like Ponce de Leon?

7. What day did Ponce de Leon make history?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Ponce de Leon claimed the land for Spain _____ the country could set up a colony.

- a. before
- b. after
- c. because
- d. so

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Ponce de Leon became governor of San Juan in 1509 because he conquered the territory and discovered gold.

Who? Ponce de Leon

(did) What? _____

When? _____

Why? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** legendary: based on a story handed down from earlier times, may not be entirely true.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____
