



Teacher Background Information: European Exploration and Colonization

Adapted from myflorida.com

Written records about life in Florida began with the arrival of the Spanish explorer and adventurer Juan Ponce de León in 1513. Sometime between April 2 and April 8, Ponce de León waded ashore on the northeast coast of Florida, possibly near present-day St. Augustine. He called the area la Florida, in honor of Pascua florida (“feast of the flowers”), Spain’s Eastertime celebration. Other Europeans may have reached Florida earlier, but no firm evidence of this has been found.

On another voyage in 1521, Ponce de León landed on the southwestern coast of the peninsula, accompanied by two-hundred people, fifty horses, and numerous work animals. His colonization attempt quickly failed because of attacks by native people. However, Ponce de León’s activities served to identify Florida as a desirable place for explorers, missionaries, and treasure seekers.

In 1539 Hernando DeSoto began another expedition in search of gold and silver, which took him on a long trek through Florida and what is now the southeastern United States. For four years, DeSoto’s expedition wandered, in hopes of finding the fabled wealth of the Indian people. DeSoto and his soldiers camped for five months in the area now known as Tallahassee. DeSoto died near the Mississippi River in 1542. Survivors of his expedition eventually reached Mexico.

No great treasure awaited the Spanish conquistadores who explored Florida. However, their stories helped inform Europeans about Florida and its relationship to Cuba, Mexico, and Central and South America, from which Spain regularly shipped gold, silver, and other products. Groups of Spanish vessels, called plate fleets,



Juan Ponce de Leon

usually sailed up the Gulf Stream through the straits that parallel Florida’s Keys. Aware of this route, pirates preyed on the fleets. Hurricanes created additional hazards, sometimes wrecking the ships on the reefs and shoals along Florida’s eastern coast.

In 1559 Tristán de Luna y Arellano led another attempt by Europeans to colonize Florida. He established a settlement at Pensacola Bay, but a series of misfortunes caused his efforts to be abandoned after two years.

Spain was not the only European nation that found Florida attractive. In 1562 the French protestant Jean Ribault explored the area. Two years later, fellow Frenchman René Goulaine de

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continued

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Laudonnière established Fort Caroline at the mouth of the St. Johns River, near present-day Jacksonville.

These French adventurers caused Spain to speed up her plans for colonization. Pedro Menéndez de Avilés hurried across the Atlantic, his sights set on removing the French and creating a Spanish settlement. Menéndez arrived in 1565 at a place he called San Agustín (St. Augustine) and established the first permanent European settlement in what is now the United States. He accomplished his goal of removing the French, attacking and killing all settlers except for non-combatants and Frenchmen who professed belief in the Roman Catholic faith. Menéndez captured Fort Caroline and renamed it San Mateo.

In fact, as late as 1600, Spain's power over what is now the southeastern United States was unquestioned. When English settlers came to America, they established their first colonies well to the North—at Jamestown (in the present state of Virginia) in 1607 and Plymouth (in the present state of Massachusetts) in 1620. English colonists wanted to take advantage of the continent's natural resources and gradually pushed the borders of Spanish power

southward into present-day southern Georgia. At the same time, French explorers were moving down the Mississippi River valley and eastward along the Gulf Coast.

The English colonists in the Carolina colonies were particularly hostile toward Spain. Led by Colonel James Moore, the Carolinians and their Creek Indian allies attacked Spanish Florida in 1702 and destroyed the town of St. Augustine. However, they could not capture the fort, named Castillo de San Marcos. Two years later, they destroyed the Spanish missions between Tallahassee and St. Augustine, killing many native people and enslaving many others. The French continued to harass Spanish Florida's western border and captured Pensacola in 1719, twenty-one years after the town had been established.

Spain's adversaries moved even closer when England founded Georgia in 1733, its southernmost continental colony. Georgians attacked Florida in 1740, assaulting the Castillo de San Marcos at St. Augustine for almost a month. While the attack was not successful, it did point out the growing weakness of Spanish Florida.





Juan Ponce de Leon

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Juan Ponce de Leon

Juan Ponce de Leon founded the first European settlement on Puerto Rico and who is credited with being the first European to reach Florida (1513).

As a reward for suppressing an Indian mutiny, Ponce de León was named the provincial governor of the eastern part of the island of Hispaniola.

At the time he did not realize that he was on the mainland of North America and instead supposed he had landed on an island. He named the region Florida because it was discovered at Easter time.

He was wounded by an arrow during a Calusa Indian attack, and he died of an infection after being returned to Cuba. Puerto Rico's third largest city, Ponce, is named in his honor.



Panfilo de Narvaez

Adapted from myflorida.com



Panfilo de Narvaez

Panfilo de Narvaez led a Spanish royal expedition to North America in 1527. After surviving a hurricane near Cuba, his expedition landed on the west coast of Florida, near Tampa Bay in April 1528.

1526, Narvaez was granted the land of Florida by the Emperor Charles V. He led an expedition there with some 250-300 men in 1528.

A series of hurricanes and fights with the local Indians killed many of the crew, and the captain of the ship sailed to Mexico without many of his men.

The stranded men soon built five crude barges on which they sailed west, hoping to reach a Spanish settlement in Mexico. Along the way, three of the vessels sank. One of these was captained by Narváez, who was never seen again.

The two surviving rafts, carrying about 80 men, landed at Galveston Island, Texas. After a very cold winter with very little food, only 15 men survived. In the spring, the men traveled west by land, walking along the Colorado River, through the deserts of modern New Mexico, and Texas, before finally reaching their countrymen.



Tristan De Luna y Arellano

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Tristan De Luna y Arellano

Tristán de Luna y Arellano was staged in New Spain (modern Mexico) and it was his job to start a colony at Pensacola.

On June 11, 1559, Luna's fleet left New Spain with some 1,500 soldiers and other colonists, 240 horses, and well over a million pounds of food.

On August 14, the fleet anchored and sent one ship back with news of their arrival, unloading people and equipment over the next five weeks, but leaving the food on board ship in order to protect it until shelter could be built on shore. On September 19, a hurricane devastated the

remaining ships at anchor, leaving only three afloat the next day.

He tried to keep the colonists alive for the next two years after the destruction of their food, He sent 4 missions for help to New Spain, and moved most of the colonists inland to the Indian town of Nanipacana. He also sent a group of 200-men northward to the town of Coosa located in Northwest Georgia in search of food to ship down river.

In March 1560, the unanimous vote by everyone was to abandon the effort and De Luna was no longer in charge.



Rene Goulaine de Laudonniere

Adapted from myflorida.com



Rene Goulaine de Laudonniere

Laudonniere was part of a group of Huguenots (French Protestants) under the command of Jean Ribault.

Laudonniere had built Fort Caroline into a growing French colony in 1564 with the intent of challenging the Spanish dominance in this part of the New World. It was built where the city of Jacksonville is today.

He described the rivers that he sailed along and the land surrounding them, making it possible to share some of the first pictures of the New

World with the help of artists that were with him.

Laudonniere tried to warn Ribault, of a Spanish attack, but was ignored. Instead, Ribault set sail in pursuit of the Spanish, only to have his fleet destroyed by a devastating storm.

Laudonniere's job was to reinforce Fort Caroline to withstand the anticipated Spanish attack which came in the midst of a torrential rainstorm. The French force was defeated in 1565, but Laudonniere escaped in his nightshirt and lived to write the history.



Compare and Contrast

Adapted from myflorida.com

1. After reading about Florida's explorers, choose two explorers and write their names on the lines in the circles.
2. Write down how they are similar in the area where the circles overlap.
3. Write down how they are different in the rest of the circles

