Lesson 1
Spanish Explorers in Florida

**Essential Question**

Why do people explore? What do you think?

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**Words To Know**

Write a number on each line to show how much you know about the meaning of each word.

1 = I have no idea!
2 = I know a little.
3 = I know a lot.

___ conquistador
___ *motivation
___ colony
___ *rule
___ natural resource
___ expedition
___ slavery

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**NGSS Standards**

SS.4.A.3.1 Identify explorers who came to Florida and the motivations for their expeditions.
SS.4.G.1.4 Interpret political and physical maps using map elements (title, compass rose, cardinal directions, intermediate directions, symbols, legend, scale, longitude, latitude).

**Do you know the end of this rhyme? Fill it in.**

In fourteen hundred ninety-two, Columbus

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**Check your answer at the bottom of the page.**

It’s true! In 1492, a man named Christopher Columbus sailed west from Europe. He hoped to find a new way to reach the continent of Asia. Instead, he landed on an island in the Bahamas, which is part of North America. His journey opened the door for other explorers to travel to North America. Some of them arrived in our state—Florida!
First Explorers

Who were these first explorers to come to Florida? They were called **conquistadors**. Conquistadors were explorers from the European country of Spain. They started arriving in North America in the 1500s. Juan Ponce de León was the first conquistador to arrive in Florida. He came in 1513. You can see his route on the map above. The map also shows the journeys taken by other conquistadors in Florida. Look back at this map as you read more about the journeys of the conquistadors in this lesson.

**Reading Skill**  
**Meaning of Words** Knowing what words mean helps you understand what you read. Underline the word **explorers** in the paragraph above. Tell a partner what this word means.

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**Map and Globe Skills**

1. Label the cardinal directions on the compass rose.

2. Label the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico.

3. Who explored the east coast of Florida? In what year?

4. Who explored the coastline of Florida’s panhandle? In what year?

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**DID YOU KNOW?**
Conquistadors also explored Mexico and lands in the Caribbean.
Motivations for and Causes of Exploration

So why did these conquistadors come to Florida in the first place? What were their motivations? After all, the journey across the Atlantic Ocean wasn’t easy. Bad weather could damage ships and easily steer the journey off course. Food and supplies were often limited. Ships weren’t very big, and people had to live on them for months. What was so appealing about Florida that conquistadors were willing to risk their lives?

The chance to increase their wealth was a major motivation of the conquistadors who came to Florida. They wanted to find gold, silver, and other valuable materials that would make them wealthy. Many conquistadors had heard stories about the riches that North America had. They wanted those riches for themselves.

Religion also motivated conquistadors to come to Florida. At this time, most people in Spain were Christians. The rulers of Spain wanted the conquistadors to spread Christianity to the Native Americans of Florida. The Spanish believed that teaching their religion to other people was part of their duty as Christians.

Did you Know?

Before they came to Florida, the Spanish had already found gold. They found it on an island called Puerto Rico in the Caribbean.

The Spanish built churches that looked similar to this one to teach Christianity to Native Americans.
Keep in mind that before the 1500s, the Native Americans that you learned about in the last unit had Florida to themselves. The arrival of the conquistadors had major effects on them. Some effects were good—others were not. Native Americans learned about the foods, animals, and culture of the Europeans. Native Americans also gained new trading partners in the Europeans. However, Europeans also brought diseases that killed thousands of Native Americans. Fights with Europeans killed many Native Americans too. You’ll learn more about these effects later in this unit.

Many natural resources from Florida were shipped back to Spain.

Colonies

Conquistadors also wanted to set up colonies in Florida. A colony is a place that is ruled by another country. Spain started colonies because of the benefits these colonies brought. For instance, having colonies meant that Spain controlled more land. The more land Spain controlled, the more power it had.

Colonies were also a source of wealth for Spain. Much of this wealth came from trade and natural resources. Natural resources are materials that come from Earth. Florida had many valuable natural resources, including wood, animals, and many kinds of plants and crops. Spain traded these resources and the products made from them with other countries. This trade earned Spain money. Having more wealth also increased the amount of power Spain had.

NGSS Standards

SS.4.A.3.1 Identify explorers who came to Florida and the motivations for their expeditions.
SS.4.A.3.2 Describe causes and effects of European colonization on the Native American tribes of Florida.

1. List two examples of natural resources.


2. Why did conquistadors explore Florida?
Florida Explorers

Exploring a new place isn’t easy, as the conquistadors quickly learned. They faced a lot of challenges on their journeys, including trouble getting along with the Native Americans. These first journeys were mostly failures. The conquistadors didn’t find riches, and the colonies they tried to set up didn’t last. Few, if any, Native Americans learned about Christianity. Below, read about some of these conquistadors who came to Florida.

As you read about each conquistador, circle the places that he explored.

Juan Garrido

Motivations: I was a conquistador, so I wanted to explore new areas and earn riches. Sadly, I died poor.

What I Did: I was born in Africa and spent time in Europe. After I came to North America, I explored Florida with Juan Ponce de León. Later on in my life, I explored Mexico.

Achievements: I was probably the first free African person to set foot in North America. I’m also remembered as perhaps the first person to grow wheat in the Americas.

Juan Ponce de León

Motivations: Many people think that I came to Florida in 1513 to find the Fountain of Youth. This magical fountain was supposed to make a person become young again. But I really came because I wanted to explore new areas and find gold. I also enslaved Native Americans. On my second trip to Florida, I tried to start a colony and spread Christianity to the Native Americans.

What I Did: I explored both coasts of Florida and the Florida Keys. Along the way, I came into contact with many Native Americans. Often our meetings were not very friendly. In fact, I was injured by the Calusa Native Americans, and I died soon after.

Proudest Moment: I’m famous for claiming Florida for Spain. The area where I landed was covered with plants in bloom, so I gave it the name Florida. This means “the land of flowers.”

FUN FACTS

A woman named Juana Ruiz was part of Ponce de León’s first voyage. She might have been the first European woman in North America!

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Achievements: He was probably the first free African person to set foot in North America. He’s also remembered as perhaps the first person to grow wheat in the Americas.
Motivations: When I arrived in Florida in 1528, I wanted to start a colony and find gold. I was disappointed when the colony didn’t work out. I also didn’t find any gold. But I did explore the western coast and panhandle of Florida.

What I Did: I had some big problems during my expedition. (In case you didn’t know, an expedition is a journey for a special purpose.) I split my group into two—a land force and a water force. Each was supposed to explore and then reconnect. But things didn’t work out that way. I was leading the land force, and we got stranded. We tried to sail to Mexico, but a storm hit us. Many were killed, including me.

Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca

Motivations: I was part of Pánfilo de Narváez’s expedition to Florida. I wanted to help him find gold and start a colony.

What I Did: I was lucky because I survived the storm that took so many lives. Some other people also made it through the storm, and this group kept trying to get to Mexico. Only four of us finally made it there, though. Along the way, we explored much of the southwest part of North America and learned about the Native Americans who lived there. My report of our journey was later published in Spain.

Quote: “The country is mostly flat, the soil sandy and firm. Throughout it there are many large trees and open woodlands . . . There are many large and small lakes . . .”

Estéban Dorantes

What I Did: I was born in Africa and lived in Spain for awhile. I was sold into slavery. Slavery is the practice of treating people as property and forcing them to work. So I came to Florida as an enslaved person in de Narváez’s expedition. I was one of the four men from that expedition who eventually made it to Mexico. Toward the end of my life, I explored Mexico and parts of southwest North America.

Other Names: Estebanico, Estevanico, Estéban de Dorantes

Write one similarity among these explorers.
Motivations: I had one major reason for exploring Florida—to find gold. I had already found some in Mexico and thought that Florida would have it too. I also was supposed to start a colony and teach Christianity to Native Americans. But I didn’t end up meeting any of my goals.

What I Did: My group explored much of the southwestern part of North America. We’re famous for being the first Europeans to cross the Mississippi River. We failed at getting along with Native Americans, though, and our groups fought many times.

Interesting Fact: During my travels, I found a man who survived Pánfilo de Narváez’s expedition, Juan Ortiz. Ortiz joined my group and helped us communicate with Native Americans.

NGSS Standards
SS.4.A.3.1 Identify explorers who came to Florida and the motivations for their expeditions.
SS.4.A.9.1 Utilize timelines to sequence key events in Florida history.

Chart and Graph Skills

Use a Time Line

Remember that a time line shows the order in which events occurred. In each box, write the name of the explorer or explorers who came to Florida that year. Include at least two details about the explorers and their expeditions too.
Who Am I?

Read the descriptions. Write the names of the explorers that are described on the lines.

1. I didn’t have a choice whether to come to Florida or not. I was an enslaved man.

2. I was the first Spanish conquistador in Florida. I tried to start a colony.

3. I was searching for gold. I didn’t find any, but I did cross the Mississippi River.

4. My journal of my travels tells how I made it to Mexico.

5. I was an African conquistador who wanted to find gold.

6. My attempt at starting a colony and finding gold failed when I split up my force.

Lesson 1

Essential Question Why do people explore?

Go back to Show As You Go! on pages 40–41.