COMMONLIT

Name: _____ Class: _____

First Contact with Europeans

By Stephen Currie
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In this informational text, Stephen Currie discusses Europeans' first contact with the Indigenous Americans who lived where Florida is today. During this time period, Europeans were just beginning to build settlements on the land where Indigenous Americans already lived.

As you read, take notes on the interactions between Europeans and Indigenous Americans.

[1] In 1513, Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León led an expedition[1] northwest from Puerto Rico. He and his men were looking for a land known as Bimini. According to rumor, Bimini was full of gold. It also was said to be home to the magical Fountain of Youth — a spring whose waters kept people forever young.

"Le Moyne lithograph of Timucua Indians greeting the French - Florida" by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues is in the public domain.

Ponce de León never located Bimini — at least, he found neither gold nor the Fountain of Youth. He did, however, become the first European to see Florida, as well as the first to meet the native people who lived there. As the explorers sailed north along Florida's southwestern shoreline, they saw some Calusa people beckoning them to come ashore. Curious, the Spanish crew dropped anchor and sent several men in small boats to the beach.

This first encounter between Europeans and Indigenous Americans of the

1. **Expedition** ***(noun)*** journey

Southeast was far from peaceful. Intrigued[2] by the supplies the visitors carried, the Calusas immediately began carting away tools, oars, and other equipment. When the outnumbered Europeans objected, a Calusa struck and wounded a Spaniard.[3] A brief battle followed, during which two more sailors were injured. The men barely managed to escape back to the safety of the ship.

Ponce de León resolved to return. In 1521, he made a second voyage to Florida. This time, he built a small colony on the shores of the west coast of Florida, the Gulf of Mexico. The Calusas there, however, were even less welcoming than the ones Ponce de León had met in 1513. Within a few months, the Calusa people attacked the colony, killed many of the Spanish — including Ponce de León — and drove away the rest.

[5] Still, the Spanish persisted.[4] In 1539, Hernando de Soto traveled through much of the Southeast, becoming the first European to visit the Indigenous American peoples of Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi. Unlike the Calusas, however, many of these tribes welcomed the explorers. One Creek ruler, for instance, spoke gracious words of friendship and courtesy while giving de Soto a beautiful string of pearls. Unfortunately, de Soto did not respond in the same manner. Backed by well-armed troops numbering six hundred, he forced the tribes to provide his men with food and shelter. De Soto also enslaved many Indigenous Americans.

Like Spain, England and France also sent expeditions to the Southeast. The three countries soon began to build towns, forts, and trading posts on Indigenous American land. In 1564, the French built Fort Caroline near present-day Jacksonville, Florida. The Spanish settled St. Augustine, Florida, one year later. And in 1607, the English established a permanent settlement at Jamestown, Virginia. Little by little, the Europeans were gaining a foothold[5] in the Southeast.

Even when European settlement began, some Indigenous Americans were welcoming to the foreigners. Trade was one important reason for this acceptance. The Europeans brought with them metal tools, firearms, and many other objects unknown in North America. Southeastern Indigenous Americans were eager to

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2. **Intrigue** ***(verb)*** to cause interest
3. a person from Spain
4. **Persist** ***(verb)*** to continue to do something
5. a position that allows for further advancement

trade their own resources for these new valuables.

Other tribes accepted the Europeans for political reasons. Powhatan, the leader of Virginia's Indigenous Peoples, for instance, probably could have destroyed Jamestown soon after it was built, but decided against it. He hoped instead to make a military alliance [6]with the newcomers and eventually defeat his own local enemies.

There were Indigenous American tribes who were deeply suspicious[7] of the Europeans, however. And as time went on, more and more Southeastern Indigenous Americans came to see the negative side of contact with Europeans. The English, French, and Spanish were not interested in sharing the land in North America with the Indigenous Americans who had been living there. Rather, the Europeans wanted to expand their empires, control the area's resources, and drive the native peoples away. And, the Europeans' advanced weaponry gave them an enormous edge in fulfilling these desires. Even the Indigenous Americans' greater numbers could not make up for the Europeans' firepower.

[10] European contact brought other problems, too. New and unfamiliar diseases were spread among the Indigenous American populations. Because they had never been exposed to these illnesses and had no built-in immunity,[8] the diseases swept through the tribes. In some parts of the Southeast, nine out of ten Indigenous Americans died of diseases ranging from measles to chicken pox.

By 1754, it was too late to stop the European advance. The first contact between the Calusa people and Ponce de León, two and a half centuries before, had ended with the Spanish being pushed out to sea. But the balance of power had changed. The destruction of the traditional southeastern Indigenous American culture was well under way.

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6. an official deal or partnership
7. **Suspicious** ***(adjective)*** without trust
8. the ability to be unaffected by an infection or toxin

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. What is the central idea of the text?
    A. Indigenous Americans avoided Europeans when they first arrived.
    B. Europeans were willing to share the land with Indigenous Americans.
    C. Indigenous Americans and Europeans both benefited equally from their alliance.
    D. Europeans clashed with Indigenous Americans when they arrived in North America.

2. Which detail best supports the idea that the Europeans did not plan to live peacefully alongside the Indigenous Americans?
    A. "As the explorers sailed north along Florida's southwestern shoreline, they saw some Calusa people beckoning them to come ashore." (Paragraph 2)
    B. "Backed by well-armed troops numbering six hundred, he forced the tribes to provide his men with food and shelter." (Paragraph 5)
    C. "Like Spain, England and France also sent expeditions to the Southeast. The three countries soon began to build towns, forts, and trading posts on Indigenous American land." (Paragraph 6)
    D. "Even when European settlement began, some Indigenous Americans were welcoming to the foreigners. Trade was one important reason for this acceptance." (Paragraph 7)

3. How does the discussion of Europeans' first meeting with the Calusa people contribute to the development of ideas in the text?
    A. It highlights how welcoming Indigenous Americans were of the Europeans.
    B. It highlights the conflict between the Europeans and Indigenous Americans.
    C. It highlights the Europeans' and Indigenous Americans' desire to form an alliance.
    D. It highlights how Europeans and Indigenous Americans needed each other to survive.

4. What is the meaning of "resolved" as it is used in paragraph 4?
    A. decided
    B. doubted
    C. feared
    D. refused

5. Which of the following describes the author's likely purpose in paragraph 5?
    A. to highlight how much new land the Europeans were able to discover in North America
    B. to suggest that the Europeans didn't realize the Indigenous Americans were offering them friendship
    C. to show that the Europeans responded violently to Indigenous Americans, even when offered friendship
    D. to show that the Europeans and Indigenous Americans were able to share the land in America successfully

6. What is the meaning of "gracious" in paragraph 5?
    A. cruel
    B. kind
    C. misleading
    D. surprising

7. Which of the following describes how the author organizes information in the text?

    A. He describes how Europeans' relationships with Indigenous Americans improved over time.
    B. He describes how the power shifted from Indigenous Americans to the Europeans over time.
    C. He compares Europeans' exploration of America with their exploration of other countries.
    D. He compares Europeans' relationships with Indigenous Americans with their relationship with other Native peoples.

8. How did the arrival of Europeans affect Indigenous Americans' way of life? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. How did the arrival of Europeans change North America? Discuss the positive and negative effects of these changes.

2. In the text, the author discusses how Europeans came to North America and claimed territory. Were there other ways that Europeans could have interacted with Indigenous Americans? How might the outcome have been different?

3. Compare and contrast the author's descriptions of the Calusa people and the Europeans. What do the descriptions suggest about how the author sees these two groups of people? Explain your answer using details from the text and your own knowledge of Indigenous American history.

4. How do you think the Calusa people felt when they first encountered Europeans in their territory? Using paragraphs 3-4 for inspiration, write a fictional journal entry describing the first encounter with Europeans from the point of view of a Calusa person.