

Vasco Nunez de Balboa Reading Comprehension

Name _____

Vasco Nunez de Balboa was a Spanish explorer (or conquistador) who saw and claimed the Pacific Ocean for Spain. He was born in 1475 in a poor region of Spain known as Extremadura, which was also the home of conquistadors Hernan Cortes, Francisco Pizarro, Hernando de Soto, and Francisco de Orellana. Balboa's family was poor and he left Spain to seek his fortune in the New World.

Escaping Creditors

Sometime around the year 1500, Balboa joined a Spanish expedition to what is now Colombia. After returning to the island of Hispaniola (which is now Haiti and the Dominican Republic), he attempted to raise pigs but was unsuccessful and accrued significant debt. In 1510, he, along with his dog, Leoncico, stowed away on a supply boat headed for the San Sebastian colony, on the coast of Colombia, in an attempt to escape his creditors. Balboa arrived and found the colony almost abandoned because most of the colonists had been killed by natives. Balboa suggested they move to the western side of the isthmus of Panama, where the natives were more peaceful and the soil was more fertile. Upon their arrival on the isthmus, however, 500 native warriors engaged them in battle. The Spanish prevailed and Balboa founded the first permanent European settlement in the Western Hemisphere and named it Santa Maria la Antigua del Darien.

The South Sea

In 1513, Balboa led an expedition to search for gold across the isthmus of Panama, based on information obtained from local natives. His expedition included 190 Spaniards, several native guides, and a pack of dogs. After three grueling weeks through the dense jungle and several deadly battles with natives along the way, Balboa sighted the Pacific Ocean, then known as the South Sea, on September 25, 1513. He claimed the ocean and all adjoining land for Spain. He became the first Spanish explorer to sight the Pacific Ocean from the New World. His discovery paved the way for additional Spanish exploration of the west coast of South America.

A Mortal Enemy

In 1514, King Ferdinand II appointed Pedro Arias Davila as the new governor of Darien. Balboa himself was named the governor of Panama and Coiba but would be subordinate to Davila. In 1517, Davila, who was threatened by and jealous of Balboa, reluctantly gave him permission to begin a second expedition to conquer the Pacific

Ocean and surrounding lands. In order to stage the expedition, Balboa's ship would be carried in pieces across the isthmus of Panama, through the jungle, and over the mountains, to be reassembled on its Pacific coast. During Balboa's expedition, however, Davila began scheming against him and had him arrested for treason in 1519. In the unjust trial that ensued, tried by a close ally of Davila, Balboa was convicted and beheaded, along with four of his fellow explorers.

1. The word “conquistador,” used in the first paragraph, is used to describe a Spanish explorer. Which of the following English words is most similar in meaning to “conquistador”?

- a) Conversationalist
- b) Conqueror
- c) Condolence
- d) Contortion

2. Which was not one of Balboa’s motivations to explore?

- a) To claim land for Spain
- b) To make money for his poor family
- c) To establish a European settlement in the West
- d) To sight the Atlantic Ocean

3. Put the following events in order.

- I. Balboa stows away on a ship with his dog.
- II. Balboa fails to raise pigs.
- III. Balboa finds the Colombian colony deserted.
- IV. Balboa establishes Santa Maria la Antigua del Darien.

- a) I, II, III, IV
- b) II, I, III, IV
- c) III, I, II, IV
- d) I, II, IV, III

4. Which was a consequence of Balboa’s exploration?

- a) Spanish exploration of the South American coast
- b) Balboa’s appointment as governor of Darien
- c) Both of the above
- d) Neither of the above

5. Which best explains the relationship between Davila and Balboa?

- a) Davila and Balboa were friends, but their relationship turned sour.
- b) Davila was inspired by Balboa to pursue exploration.
- c) Davila envied Balboa and caused his ruin.
- d) Davila and Balboa were political comrades.

6. Which statement about Balboa is supported by the passage?

- a) He stowed away with Leoncico around age 35.
- b) He was arrested for treason after he turned 50.
- c) He alone was convicted and beheaded for treason.
- d) He sighted the Pacific Ocean at age 40.

7. Which pairing of individual with task is incorrect?

- a) King Ferdinand II – gave Davila his governorship
- b) Davila – arrested Balboa for treason
- c) Balboa – first Spanish explorer to sight Pacific Ocean from the New World
- d) Pizarro – only explorer to grow up in Extremadura

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1. (b)
2. (d)
3. (b)
4. (a)
5. (c)
6. (a)
7. (d)