Can You Decipher Juan Ponce de León’s Signature?

Copies of Juan Ponce de León’s signature activity sheet
Red pencil or crayon
Pencil or pen
Blank sheet of paper

Instructions
Print enough activity sheets for everyone in the class and pass them out to the students. This can be completed individually or in groups.

Be sure each student has a blank sheet of paper and a pencil or pen.

Activity

Everyone’s signature is different. Some are easier to read than others. Before you complete this activity, take your pen or pencil and sign your name on the blank sheet of paper. When you are finish, exchange papers with another student. Compare your signature. Is yours hard to read? Can you easier read the other student’s signature?

Juan Ponce de León’s signature is hard to read. Some of the words look like abbreviations. Can you read his name and decipher his signature?

To help decipher Ponce de Leon’s signature, we need to understand something about old Spanish. Spanish writers often used abbreviations for names and other words. To learn more, visit http://script.byu.edu/spanish/en/chabbreviations.aspx.

1. Juan

Juan is spelled like this in old Spanish—Ju. or Ju.°

Look at Ponce’s signature. Can you find his first name, Juan? It might be hard to see his full first name. When you look at it there are some letters missing. When you find it, trace it with a red pencil or crayon. Remember to look for Juan spelled like one of the examples above.
2. Ponce

Now that you have found “Juan,” can you find “Ponce” in the signature?

Ponce is written \( \overline{\text{P o e}} \). Does this look like the word “Ponce?”

First off, we can see the “P, o, and e.” But what about the “c?” In this case the letter is written as \( \overline{c} \).

What about the letter “n?” We already now four of the letters. Look at the straight line about the word. What do you think that represents?

This is another abbreviation for a letter. The straight line, \( \overline{\text{n}} \), can represent either an “n” or “m.” So now that we know where the letter “n” is, the word “Ponce” is now complete. Trace the word in red.

3. De Leon

Can you find “de Leon?”

If not, don’t worry. Remember, a lot of times Spanish writers would leave letters out replacing them with a symbol such as a line above the word. In the case of “de Leon,” the “de” is spelled with an open “d” with the “e” attached, \( \overline{\text{d e}} \). Find this and trace it in red.

For “Leon,” you should be able to find “Leo.” But where is the “n?” \( \overline{\text{Leo}} \)

If you forgot, look at the last question. What does the straight line represent? It represents the letter “n.” Now trace the word “Ponce” in red.

The squiggly lines on the sides and bottom of the signature are just for decoration.

If your name has the letters “m, n, or c,” how would Your signature look if you used the symbols Ponce used to sign his name?