FLORIDA

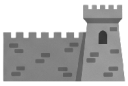
THE SUNSHINE STATE *Became a state March 3, 1845 (27th)*

Most of Florida is a long, flat peninsula, a piece of land with water on three sides. It has more coastline than any other state except Alaska, and warm weather nearly all year.



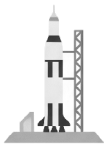
A Land Named for Flowers

In the spring of 1513, the Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León sailed to a green coast he had never seen. It was the Easter season, which the Spanish called Pascua Florida, the feast of flowers. He named the land La Florida. Native peoples had already lived there for thousands of years. Among them were the Timucua and the Calusa.



A Fort Built of Seashells

The Spanish founded St. Augustine in 1565. It is the oldest town on the United States mainland started by Europeans and lived in ever since. To guard it, they built a fort from coquina, a soft stone made of tiny seashells pressed together. Cannonballs sank into the walls instead of cracking them. The fort was never captured in battle.



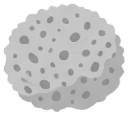
Next Stop, the Moon

Rockets fly from Florida's east coast for two reasons. They launch over the ocean, so falling pieces land in the water, not on towns. Florida is also closer to the equator than most states, and there the spinning Earth gives a rocket an extra push. In July 1969, Apollo 11 lifted off from here and carried the first people to walk on the Moon.



The River of Grass

The Everglades looks like a swamp, but it is really a river. Water spreads south from Lake Okeechobee in a wide, shallow sheet that barely seems to move. Sawgrass grows up through it. In 1947 the writer Marjory Stoneman Douglas called it a river of grass. That same year it became a national park.



Divers from Greece

Natural sponges are the soft skeletons of simple sea animals. In 1905 a Greek sponge buyer named John Cocoris brought divers from Greece to Tarpon Springs. Wearing heavy suits and helmets, they gathered sponges from water too deep to reach from a boat. Many Greek families followed, and the town is still known for its sponge docks and Greek food.



Saving the Florida Panther

The Florida panther is a kind of cougar that once roamed the whole Southeast. Hunting and lost forests left only about 20 to 30 by the early 1990s, and many were sickly. In 1995 scientists brought in eight female cougars from Texas. The kittens were healthier, and today there are about 120 to 230 adult panthers.

BY THE NUMBERS

Population	About 23.5 million (3rd most)
Size	About 65,800 square miles (22nd largest)
Highest point	Britton Hill, 345 feet
Counties	67
Neighbors	Georgia, Alabama

FIND IT ON THE MAP

1. Which city is the capital?
2. Which city is closest to Kennedy Space Center?
3. What stone is the Castillo de San Marcos made of?

Answers: 1. Tallahassee 2. Orlando 3. Coquina

DID YOU KNOW?

- Britton Hill is the lowest high point of any state. Many buildings in Miami are taller than that.
- Key West is closer to Cuba than to Miami. Cuba is only about 100 miles away.
- Tupelo honey comes from white tupelo trees that bloom for only a few weeks each spring.
- The St. Johns River drops less than 30 feet over its 310 miles, so it flows very slowly.