Mythology Unit: Anticipation Guide

Please answer each question with A (agree) or D (disagree)

_____ Only the ancient Greeks wrote myths.

_____ The myths are just funny stories that have no point.

_____ All myths are lies.

_____ Myths were told as a way of explaining things to a people.

_____ Greek gods and heroes were strong, beautiful and intelligent, but also quarrelsome, unforgiving, jealous and spiteful.

_____ Greek mythology has shaped American culture and the world.

_____ Early myths were not written down.

Guided Reading on Mythology: English 9
The word myth, which literally means "word" or "story" in ancient Greek, refers to authorless tales spread by ancient communities. Other communities besides the Greeks, such as the Sumerians and Egyptians, also spread communal myths, but the Greek ones are most well-known in Western culture.

The characters in Greek myths are typically gods and heroic humans. Each story contains a lesson for mortal humans on Earth to learn from the immortal gods, and various kinds of tragic human heroes. Most often, these lessons either concerned morality or an explanation of how a feature of nature was created.

1. Name two cultures other than Greece who had myths.

2. Who are the characters in Greek myths?

3. What are two reasons that myths are told?

The Romans also maintained a collection of myths. Actually, almost all of their mythical stories and characters are taken from the original Greek myths. The essential difference is that, while Greek myths generally seek to express a moral lesson or explain a facet of nature, Roman myths often also have a political message. The names of the Roman gods and heroes are the Latin translation of the Greek names. So, for example, in Greek mythology, Zeus is the god of the sky; in Roman mythology, Jupiter plays this role. Both are said to have essentially the same history and families.

4. Where did the Romans get their ideas for their myths?
5. What is the essential difference between Roman and Greek myths?

The interesting thing about these early myths is that they were primarily transmitted orally from one generation to the next. Because they were never written down, they could be told slightly differently depending on who was doing the telling/exaggerating, and this could alter the myth's essential message. Fortunately, pencils were eventually invented, and myths were recorded in print. The two main myth-writing guys were Hesiod and Homer. Homer, a Greek poet who lived in the late eighth century B.C., wrote two very influential epic (translation: long) poems that helped to define mythology. He wrote "The Iliad" and "The Odyssey," which chronicled events during the Trojan War.

6. How were early myths originally told?

7. Who was Homer?