*Just Walk on By: A Black Man Ponders His Power to Alter Public Space*

By: Brent Staples

An author and editorial writer forthe *New York Times*, Brent Staples (b. 1951) grew up in Pennsylvania in a family of nine children. He received his BA from Widener University and his PhD in psychology from the University of Chicago. The essay *Just Walk on By: A Black Man Ponders His Power to Alter Public Space* originally appeared in *Ms.* magazine in 1986.

*Respond to all questions in your reader’s notebooks*.

1. Complete the Big 5 in chart format. (Audience, purpose, context, content and theme).
2. Circle any unfamiliar or unknown words. Choose 5 words to write the word and its definition. Then, use it in a sentence. Add these vocabulary words to the vocabulary section of your reader’s notebooks.
3. What is the impact of the opening sentence, “My first victim was a woman…”? How is Brent Staples using the term “victim”? How does the meaning of the sentence and the term change as you read and reread the essay?
4. In what ways does the description at the beginning resemble a scene from a novel? What mood does Staples set with the details and specific words he chooses? Pay close attention to modifiers and verbs.
5. What examples does Staples provide to illustrate “the language of fear” (para. 3)?
6. Is the final paragraph intended to be flippant? Humorous? Explain whether you find it an effective conclusion to the essay?
7. How would you describe the overall tone of this essay? You might consider a phrase rather than a single word to capture the complexity of this piece. Support your reading with specific references to Staples’s language.
8. Holistic Scoring Guide: Staples first wrote this essay in 1986. Do you think the essay is dated? Explain why you do or do not feel that many people in today’s society continue to perceive young African American males as threatening. (Don’t forget to use evidence from the text in your response).