

ESSENTIALS

Inside Amazon
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buildings. Like the fact that every building is named after something significant from Amazon's past, including the last name of the company's first customer (Wainright) and the company's first dog (Rufus).

My favorite stop was the Brazil Building, where each floor represents a country, with displays of local currency and items popular in that particular region. At a stop on one floor, Flicker took us to a room filled with free advance copies of new releases.

Fresh from a free book high, I never saw the near-ambush by a little yappy dog as I floated down the hallway. A small fence and a fast-moving owner quickly thwarted the attack.

My trauma was soothed at our final stop in yet another building, where a demonstration of a robotic arm used in the distribution centers yielded more swag—a recharger and a selfie stick.

I even got a free banana from a bananista at the end of the tour, from Amazon's year-round banana stand. What more could anyone ask for? *Free. Ages 6 and older.*

amazonhq.tours.com **DAVID VOLK**



Amazon workers, beneath the art installation, *There Is Another Sky*



Kobi Yamada, with a plush version of the "idea" from his book, *What Do You Do with an Idea?*

IT MIGHT SEEM UNLIKELY THAT A BOOK FOR CHILDREN, published by Compendium, a Seattle-based company that mostly makes gifts, would catch fire, sell 500,000 copies, win national awards, and hit number three on the *New York Times* best-seller list in the Children's Picture Books category. Yet, *What Do You Do with an Idea?*, written by Seattle writer and Compendium president Kobi Yamada, is clearly the little book that could. Beginning with the simple declaration "One day, I had an idea," the story describes how a child sticks to his idea and grows it—even when those around him insist it's "no good" or "weird." Yamada's latest book, *What Do You Do with a Problem?*, released just a few months ago, already claims the top spot on Amazon's list of children's self-esteem books, and at press time, was number two on the *New York Times* list. "Everything was once an idea," says Yamada, who lives in Fremont. We caught up with him recently.

» **How did you think of *What Do You Do with an Idea?***

My whole life I've had ideas; it takes courage and faith to believe in them. When I came to the company in 1992, [Compendium] didn't seem like a success story. So we had to believe in our idea. You innately wonder if your thoughts are worthy. And there are ways that people react to ideas that can be deflating; ideas can be killed with an eye roll. I thought, we are going to have to work on this more. So I sat down and started writing it. At first, as the book says, I didn't know if it was any good.

» **Why does this book resonate so much with readers?**

It's an ageless kids' book. It's also a great book for parents, and for teachers to talk with

kids about concepts such as believing in your own self-worth. And it strikes a chord with adults who have lived through people turning their ideas down. Maybe they didn't take that chance or back that business. It's reminding them that these things are still possible.

» **Who, besides kids, do you think is reading it?**

It's been embraced by the tech and entrepreneurial section of society as well as the creative class, such as dancers and writers. An orchestra in Australia is going to do an original work on the book, and the Phoenix Art Museum wants to do an installation based on it.

» **How did you get the word out about this book?**

Word of mouth. We didn't do

a big marketing campaign; it took two years for the book to become a best-seller. That's unusual. It's a little bit like an indie film making it as a major blockbuster two years later. But it's representative of the book: When you have an idea whose time has come, it's a pretty unstoppable thing. You can't unthink an idea.

» **What made you come up with *What Do You Do with a Problem?***

Based on observations of myself and others, I find that we tend to avoid problems. Problems feel like they are all encompassing—they get very heavy on you. That's because we don't deal with them in a very constructive way. I wanted to help kids to look at problems a little differently. **LINDA MORGAN**