A stranger in an airplane sparked a conversation with me the other day. Rather than the usual awkward seatmate dialogue, we ended up having a good conversation. He told me about his time in Iraq and playing craps in Vegas. I told him about my visit to Laos, where he would be stationed next. Although our half-hour exchange may have felt like little more than a way to pass time, we were actually discovering connections, establishing common ground, and taking on roles. I didn’t realize this until about a week later, when I read "A Good Talk: The Story and Skill of Conversation, former New Yorker editor Daniel Menaker’s latest book." In his seven chapter discourse on conversation,
Menaker explains the evolution, mechanics, and benefits of human conversation. His entertaining new read offers a fresh perspective on how and why conversations play significant roles in our lives. Inside the Book, Menaker has a tendency to elaborate and digress. He shows this habit right from the beginning, with 22 pages of opening remarks. In his wordy, amusing style, he speculates on the origin and evolution of conversation. He makes points about the essence of conversation by referring to various social science studies. You leave those opening remarks with a clearer sense of why conversation is hard to study, what makes it unique, and where it probably came from. You also feel like Menaker has talked to you, a theme that continues throughout the book. Next, Menaker explores the history of conversation, from Socrates to talk shows. He goes on to break down the components of a conversation, using a long transcribed conversation between himself and an acquaintance as a case study.

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