The fun of this extract is that these two young ladies, who mistakenly think they are competing for the same man, cannot openly fight or argue, as it would be against social etiquette. Instead, they have to resort to put-downs and implications.

Discussion questions:

1) Why are the girls quiet at first when the servant is setting out tea?
2) How does Cecily respond to Gwendolen’s offer of an innocuous subject?
3) Who wins the round of conversational warfare in the brief exchange from this topic offer to line 11?
4) How does Cecily’s discussion of agricultural depression add to the humour?
5) How does Gwendolen’s aside add to the humour?
6) What reason does Gwendolen give for refusing sugar? How is Oscar Wilde making fun of fashionable girls here?
7) How does Cecily annoy Gwendolen without seeming to behave badly in front of the servants?
8) How does the tone of the conversation change when the servants exit, and why?
9) What is Cecily implying by her final comment?
10) Throughout the conversation, the girls speak in an exaggeratedly correct manner. Why do you think Wilde has them speak in this way, and how does it add to the humour? Choose one example to discuss.
11) How important is food in this extract?
12) What are your impressions of Cecily and Gwendolen? Who do you feel has the upper hand? Decide this by awarding points to each side for every topic discussed.