



***LARGE MAMMALS, STICK INSECTS AND OTHER SOCIAL MISFITS* BY FELICITY MCCALL**

About the book

It's Derry and it's the Hallowe'en break. And Aimée McCourt Logan's cross-border exchange partner (yeah, she goes to *that* kind of school) Caoimhe is coming to visit. More to the point, she's bringing her dream-god brother Darren with her. Meanwhile, Aimée is trying to keep her co-best friends' lives on track and she's implementing a new health and beauty regime (any day now). Armed with her trusty stack of lists, a hot chocolate and the all-powerful Facebook – and with a little hindrance from her cat, Rainbow – nothing is impossible.

This is a hilarious and honest depiction of life as a fifteen-year-old, when virtual friends sometimes seem more important than real ones ...

About the author

A BBC staff journalist for twenty years during the Northern Ireland conflict, Felicity McCall is a full-time writer as well as an occasional broadcaster, arts facilitator and actor. *Large Mammals* is her fourteenth book and her first for young adults. She loves living in Derry where the arts are part of everyday life, and gets a lot of her inspiration from its dynamic teenagers.

ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION...

The book raises a number of issues that are relevant to teenagers today. These topics can be discussed very broadly (see list below) through English, Drama or SPHE, or in more detail (see questions that follow):

- Identity and self confidence
- Appearance and body image
- Friendships and relationships
- Family dynamics
- Exam pressure
- Disability
- Alcohol and drug abuse



EXPLORATIONS

Here are some themes and topics for individual and/or group work:

Identifying issues

1. What are the key issues for Aimée and her friends?
2. How do they compare with your own concerns?
3. How do the book's characters handle difficult situations? What you might have done in their place? Debate different outcomes.
4. What do you think happens next for Aimée and her friends?

Identity and self esteem. Celebrity culture. Body image.

1. Aimée worries she is a large mammal surrounded by stick insects. What does this tell you about how she sees herself?
2. How does your life compare to Aimée's?
3. Do you think the fashion industry or the media have a role to play in how we feel about our bodies?
4. Write a personal profile that makes you sound your best, as Aimée does. Then get a close friend to write one for you. Compare. What does this tell you about how we see each other?
5. What does it mean to be fifteen? Make this an intergenerational project – ask your parents, your grandparents or older family members what they felt like at fifteen. Get them to describe their daily life.
6. Ask an older family member or friend what advice they would have given to their teenage self.
7. Write a diary entry – maybe your own, or create a character and write his/hers. Keep a diary for a week, a month or a term. Find out about renowned diarists. What can we learn from their work? What contribution have they made to our history?
8. Write a letter to yourself. Include in it:
 - your hopes and plans for the future
 - your worries
 - who you'd like to be at seventeen, eighteen, twenty-one, thirty ...Keep it in a sealed envelope to read at a later date.



Social networking.

Discuss the impact of using social networks on your life: the good, the intrusive, the potential danger.

Place

1. How does where you live compare to Derry as it is portrayed in this book?
2. How much do you know about peace and reconciliation work in the North? Does it matter to you? Why? What does cross-border co-operation mean to you?
3. Would you like to find out more about Derry and its role as UK Capital of Culture 2013?
4. Would it be possible to set up a twinning relationship with another school? What would be good about this? Could you plan an exchange visit?