

You have already learned about the soft sign **ь** (**мягкий знак**) earlier in the course. It palatalizes (makes it sound soft) most of the consonants in Russian:

Это – соль. *This is salt.*

Это – апельсин. *This is an orange.*

Это – письмо. *This is a letter.*

Я читаю письмо. Оно из Америки. *I am reading a letter. It is from America.*

Remember that the soft sign blends the sound [y] with the consonant that precedes it. The soft sign does not change the sound of the letter that follows it, it palatalizes only the preceding consonant.

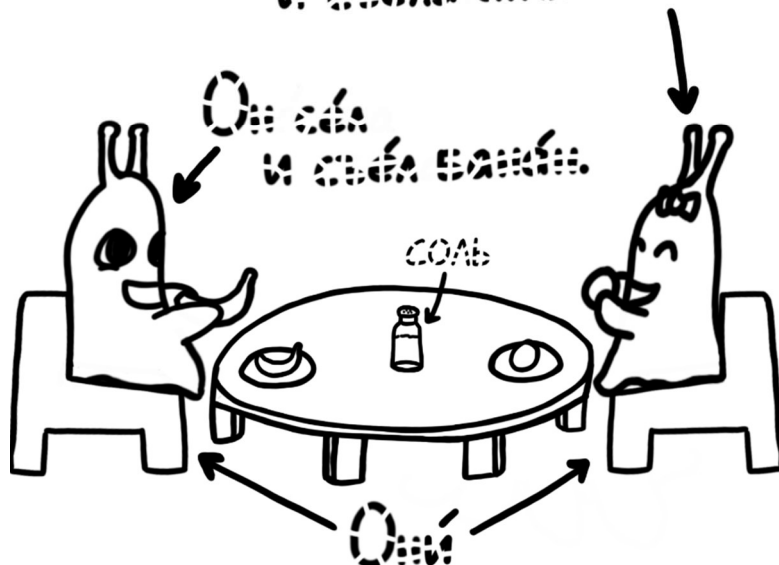
What about this letter - **ъ**?

This letter is called the hard sign - **твёрдый знак**. Just like the soft sign, it only has the lower case form because no word in Russian begins with this letter.

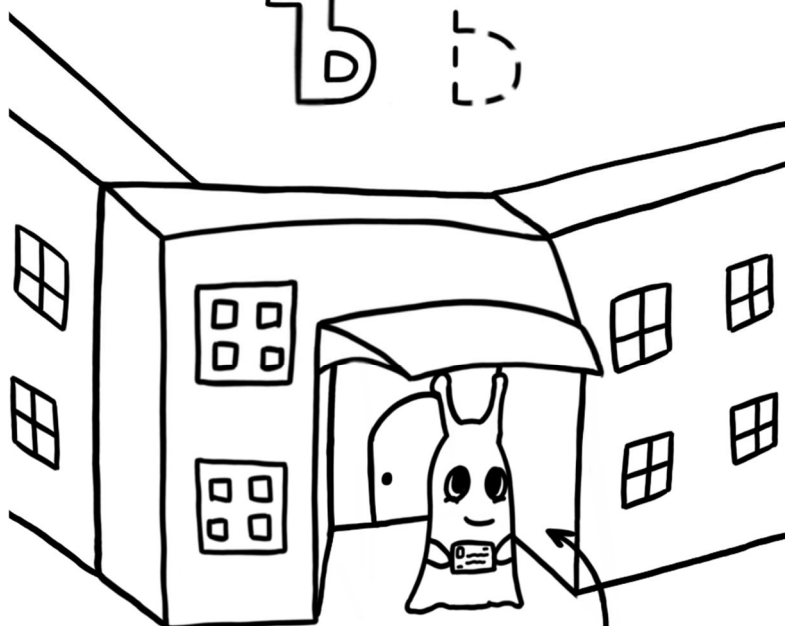
ь ь

Она села
и съела апельсин.

Он сел
и съел банан.



ъ ъ



Я читаю письмо.
Оно из Америки.

подъезд

In fact, the hard sign – **ъ** – is rarely used in Russian. What does it do? The hard sign – **ъ** – separates the sounds. Just like the words *soft* and *hard* are antonyms (their meanings are opposite), the hard sign – **ъ** – does the opposite of what the soft sign – **ь** – does. The hard sign – **ъ** – makes sure that the consonant is not blended with the following vowel. Listen and compare:

сел – (he) sat down

съел – (he) ate

поделка – a hand-crafted piece

подъезд – an entrance porch

Она села и съела апельсин. –

She sat and ate an orange.

Он сел и съел банан. –

He sat and ate a banana.